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MRS. MORTON OF MEXICO

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By ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

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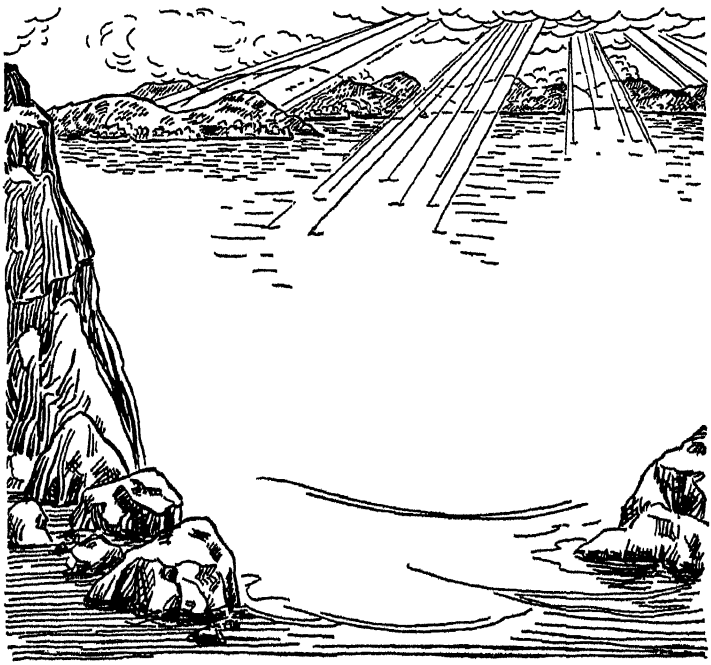

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The persons and the events herein depicted are imaginary; and no real name that is known to the author has been used.

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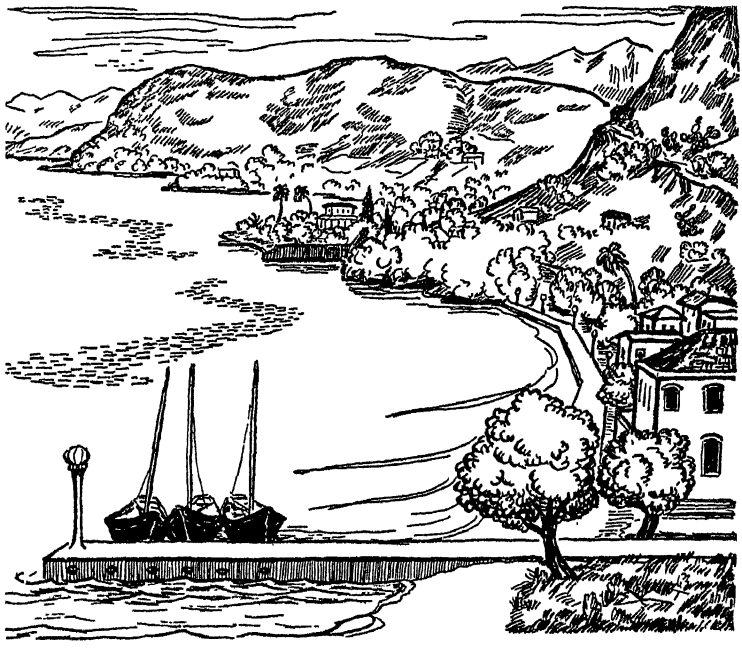
. . . On a promontory beside Lake Chapala there now stands a stele of granite on which are engraved the lines:

PRAYER AT CHAPALA

Lords of this lake! Lords brooding over this lake
Most visibly in the evening! Give us our daily bread;
Give us the power to take our brother's hand in kindness;
Grant us the strength to forgive ourselves our sins;
Fortify our courage—that we may love life
And fear not pain and old-age and death,
And that we may walk quietly in our own paths without evil. Amen.

It is known to everyone that the stone was erected by Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano; and it is presumed that the lines are of his composition. . . .



I

THE DISCOVERY OF CHAPALA

When Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clay Morton and their schoolboy son Albert arrived at Lake Chapala, they were surprised at the enthusiasm with which they were received by the Widow Sánchez, proprietress of the small Hotel Universal. Their first appearance at the door, dusty and jolted after their wearisome drive from Guadalajara, evoked no special demonstration. It was only after they had registered and after the buxom Widow Sánchez had scrutinized the name Morton that the exuberant royal welcome

began. She beamed upon them; she kissed young Albert, much to his disgust, and put a flower into Mr. Morton's buttonhole, and poured forth a flood of eloquent Spanish.

"What's all this fuss about?" Mr. Morton said suspiciously to Plutarco Juarez, the rat-faced interpreter he had brought with him from Mexico City.

"She say she very welcome you to Chapala—that all everybody be very happy you come at last. That why you not write her you coming? That why you not never come all long time before? That maybe you want to make big surprise."

"Hum! I guess that means she doesn't get many people from the States and she intends to charge us sucker prices for our rooms. Ask her what kind of rooms she can give us, and how much she wants for them."

Mr. Morton was not enjoying his six-weeks' tour of Mexico. He had come only because his wife insisted. "You need a rest, dear, after the strain of working so hard on that billboard campaign." He was an advertising executive of sorts. "And it has been a nervous year for you, worrying over your income tax, and having those nasty Internal Revenue men beat you in the courts and make you pay that hideous sum of money. You must go away. And Albert is working too hard in school. I know he is, he looks so pale. And I need a change and a rest myself. Why not take six weeks off, and visit our nearest and charming Latin neighbors?"

But Mr. Morton had not found his nearest Latin neighbors charming. The high plateau of the Mexican capital made him short of breath and nervous; and the happy-go-lucky Mexican way of doing things was profoundly irritat-

ing. These people didn't know the meaning of time or punctuality. In Mexico City a fine-looking business man whom he accosted in a hotel bar had accepted with elaborate courtesy his invitation to luncheon the next day—and then did not show up at all. That was the kind of people they were.

And the food in the hotels was the limit—endless courses of greasy dishes, each one more peppery and more unappetizing than the last. No wonder the guidebook said most of the Mexican peasants had stomach ailments. The servants didn't speak a word of English. The price of cigarettes was mere highway robbery. There were no interesting souvenirs to buy. The taxis were as old as Adam, and the chauffeurs drove like murderous madmen. It was impossible to get any Grade A milk for Albert, who was growing and needed it. All the milk had to be boiled, and Albert wouldn't touch it. There were no subways, no decent theatres, no attractive night clubs; and if there were any gay and pretty señoritas, they must be kept in pretty close, for Mr. Morton hadn't seen any of them wandering about. The official sights such as the Cathedral and the Pyramids and the Floating Gardens made no big hit with him. The bullfight was a loud, showy mess, and it gave him a pain in the neck.

Briefly, Mr. Morton did not care for Mexico or the Mexicans.

An American with whom he had talked in the lobby of his hotel in Mexico City—a rather intelligent-looking man who said he was a magazine writer—had told him that Lake Chapala was a lovely spot of a thousand charms. When Mr. Morton repeated this to Plutarco, the interpreter

shook his head. "No, sir. Nothing there. Just little town—no railroad, no anything. You not like it. Just lake. Just poor people. Nothing nice."

But since Mr. Morton had had more than enough of Mexico City, and since he was a man who resisted opposition, he had decided to go to Chapala in spite of his interpreter's advice. Plutarco was a Mexican and therefore mendacious, lazy, and irresponsible, and his advice was worth no consideration whatsoever.

So to Chapala the Mortons went. After an uncomfortable night's train journey, they had a still more uncomfortable drive for hours through a monotonous bleak landscape; and at last the bumping car descended a rocky slope toward a lake; and a few roofs and the twin spires of a church appeared; and they drove through cobbled streets of one-story stucco houses to the door of the Hotel Universal.

After the fuss of the Widow Sánchez' welcome was over, Mr. Morton inspected the premises. What he found was disquieting. The Hotel Universal was absolutely the worst hotel he had encountered in any part of the world, and he had been around a lot. The rooms were clean enough—that's all you could say for them. No comfortable chairs. Bare floors. Bowl and pitcher for washing, on an oilcloth-covered washstand. And the astounding information that if you wanted a bath, the public bathhouse was only five blocks down the street. And as for the toilet—good night!

"We can't stay here!" Mrs. Morton exclaimed indignantly.

"Of course not, my dear," Mr. Morton agreed.

"Must do." Plutarco grinned. "Not can get car tonight." It gave him pleasure to see his employers punished for their

stubborn folly in bringing him to this out-of-the-way place.

Mr. Morton went downstairs and took a look at the dining-room. One look was enough. Finding Plutarco in the lobby, he said: "We don't want to eat here. Where's a better restaurant?"

Plutarco snickered. "Eat here—else not eat. No other restaurant. But this very fine place."

"The hell it is!"

"Very fine place," Plutarco persisted. "All *politicos*, all *magnificos*, all *generales*—they come here on fiesta days from Guadalajara—for eat big dinner, make speech, sing, everything! Sometimes one hundred—two hundred—three hundred mens. Get drunk. Shoot revolvers. Get killed. Fine dinner. Widow Sánchez, she very famous cook. She make *mole* very wonderful. Um-um!" Plutarco patted his stomach and rolled his eyes.

"What's *mole?*"

"She make *mole*—turkey, with chocolate gravy. Um!"

"You can have it. What else can she give us?"

"*Gusanos de maguey?* Um! She make wonderful!"

"What's that?"

"Very fine. Taste like snail. Mexican peoples like very much. *Gusanos de maguey* is big white worm who eat inside maguey plant. First he get big—then he get fat—then he get caught—then he get fried. Um! Very nice!"

"Like hell it is. You tell her to give us ham and eggs and bread and butter and chocolate. I guess she can do that?"

"Yes, sir; yes, sir!"

Mr. Morton decided to go outside and walk around; maybe he could discover some of the charms of Chapala that the American magazine writer had spoken of. He did

not discover any. The lake and the mountains were all very well, but he had plenty of lakes and mountains at home. The town of Chapala looked to him like a small-time summer resort that had gone broke. After an hour or so he returned gloomily to the hotel.

The Widow Sánchez rushed out from behind the desk. Her flood of hospitable Spanish began again.

"What in God's name is she saying now?" Mr. Morton growled at Plutarco.

"She say she not know till today that Mrs. Morton have a brother. And she so happy to see you come. And Mrs. Morton be so happy."

"What? My wife has no brother. What does this woman mean? How does it concern her, anyhow?"

There was a prolonged conversation between the Widow Sánchez and Plutarco. At last Plutarco seemed to have got the matter clear in his head. He turned triumphantly to Mr. Morton.

It appeared that the Widow supposed that of course Mr. Morton was a relative of the wonderful Señora Morton, an elderly Englishwoman who had for twenty years lived in quiet retirement here at Lake Chapala. She was a *fenomeno*. Her husband, a mining engineer, had died many years ago and her children had married and gone away; but she herself, instead of going back to her own people in England, had preferred to stay on here in her house, the Villa Colima, beside the Lake. She was very old, and carried an ebony walking-stick with a top of real silver, and walked clump-clump-clump about the streets as if she were twenty. She was the friend of everybody in the village. A real *fenomeno*.

Mr. Morton said: "What a queer freak the old lady must be, to live here alone in this God-forsaken place for so long! Maybe she committed some crime, and doesn't dare go back to England."

Plutarco translated this last suggestion to the Widow Sánchez. She threw up her hands in indignant horror. "*Maria Santissima!*" she whispered in an awful voice, and glaring at her guest she turned her back and walked away.

At supper the ham and eggs proved to be bearable, the chocolate was good, and the dessert of varied fresh fruits was excellent. When the family rose from the table, a little less cross than when they had sat down, Mr. Morton said with a laugh: "Well, my dear, what do you say to our going to call on my alleged sister this evening?"

His wife stared at him. "What for?"

"Oh, I don't know." Mr. Morton had not been serious in his suggestion, but his wife's obvious opposition made the suggestion appear attractive. "Oh, just out of curiosity. There's nothing else to do in this jumping-off place tonight. And it might be rather fun to see how she lives, and joke with her a little about my being her brother—and everything."

"You certainly have a morbid curiosity. I wouldn't stir a step to see her. But there's nothing to prevent your going by yourself."

Mr. Morton hunted up Plutarco and told him to find out where Señora Morton, the *fenomeno*, lived and then go with him on his expedition.

As they were leaving the lobby, Plutarco pulled Mr. Morton's sleeve and motioned over his shoulder to a corner.

"You look there! See man!"

Mr. Morton looked, and saw an elderly English-looking person in knickerbockers who was sitting in a wicker chair beside a small table and partaking of coffee while he smoked his pipe and glanced at a newspaper.

"That British vice-consul from Mexico City," Plutarco whispered. "He come here often to Widow Sánchez' hotel. Always have same room on lake-front with balcony: if anybody else got his room, Widow Sánchez throw first person out. He come here many many years—two, three times each year."

"What does he come for?"

"For sit on terrace, read book, smoke pipe, take walk, smoke pipe some more. English very queer people, sir."

"This is the place for queer people."

"Sir?"

"Let's be getting on."

After a ten-minute walk along the lake and then back into dusty lanes, they arrived at a high wall over whose top the dark masses of palms and other tropical trees were visible against the stars. There was a huge gate, built as if to withstand a siege.

"This her house," Plutarco said. "This Villa Colima." He pulled the bell-rope. Mr. Morton heard the jangle of a bell somewhere beyond the wall.

After an interval, a barefooted frowsy native opened one-half of the gate. He held up a lantern and peered at the two visitors suspiciously. Plutarco spoke in Spanish. The frowsy man opened the gate a little wider.

"This man is gardener," Plutarco explained. "His name Chango. That same as 'monkey.' He-he-he! He crazy man

—you know?—not right in head. I tell him go bring cook or houseboy. He not understand anything I say."

Mr. Morton stared at the blurred half-witted face of the gardener—the face of a puzzled child—and walked through the gate. He guessed there was no danger. He found himself in a small stone-paved courtyard, with the lighted windows of a house ahead of him.

A Mexican woman came hurrying across the courtyard. She was tall and handsome, and grave and dignified, and was obviously a servant. She spoke in low tones to the gardener, glancing meanwhile at the strangers. The gardener replied mumblingly, and rubbed his bare feet together in perplexity.

Mr. Morton turned to his interpreter. "Tell this woman that I am Mr. Morton, and that I have come to call on my sister. Tell her to repeat just that to Señora Morton." He chuckled to himself as he thought how this announcement would surprise the queer old English lady when it was brought to her.

Plutarco translated. The face of the Mexican woman was now hard and stern. She stared at Mr. Morton in silence. Then she spoke. Plutarco translated:

"She say, 'Señora Morton has no brother.' "

At that moment the front door of the house opened and a neatly-clad houseboy in white uniform and brown sandals hurried across the courtyard. He asked the gardener a sharp question and pointed accusingly at the gate.

"You tell him," Mr. Morton said to Plutarco.

Plutarco spoke to the houseboy at some length. The houseboy frowned, shook his head, and spoke briefly.

"What did he say?" Mr. Morton asked.

"He say you no can come in. He say he wait for other gentleman, not for you. He say other gentleman—great *magnifico*—come tonight."

"Did you tell him that I was Mrs. Morton's brother? Say that I want to get in!"

Before Plutarco could convey this information to the houseboy, the front door of the house opened again. There, outlined against the lamplight of the inner hall, stood the figure of an old woman leaning on a slender cane. She spoke with a slightly quavering voice, but very clearly and decisively.

"What is this? Did I hear someone talking English? Pedro! Clara!"

Mr. Morton stepped forward into the shaft of light and took off his hat. "Yes, Madam. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Henry Clay Morton, of New York—and the Widow Sánchez imagined that I must be your brother and that I had come here to visit you—so I thought I'd pay you a call."

There was a moment of pause. Then the old voice said: "How interesting. Please come in."

He followed her through the hall and into a rather pleasant living-room where there were many books on shelves along the walls and several shaded lamps on the tables. He got a glimpse of a wide terrace beyond the opened French windows, and a garden, and then the dark surface of the lake.

The old lady turned. "Won't you be seated?" she said. She was a small, erect woman with white hair, an alert face and penetrating eyes. She wore a dark dress, with fine lace

at her throat and wrists. She had an air of composed authority that was not quite what he expected to find.

Mr. Morton sat down. "Amusing, isn't it, that the Widow Sánchez thought I must be your brother!"

"Perhaps there is some relationship. My husband was Seymour Morton, eldest son of Dr. Edward Howland Morton. We are Sussex people. Is that a branch of your family?"

"I don't know. Probably it is—but it would be hard for me to say. We're all related—if you go back as far as Adam! Well, I thought I'd stop in and give you a little greeting—stranger to stranger in a foreign land!" He was slightly embarrassed now that he had actually succeeded in butting in on her.

She hesitated a moment, smiled, and said: "I have been here so long a time that I hardly feel a stranger in Chapala. But I have no doubt this country seems to you rather odd after New York."

"It certainly does."

"Are you enjoying your visit to Mexico? How does it impress you?"

"Frankly—though I wouldn't like to have this get around—it doesn't impress me too favorably. I haven't found much of interest. Of course there are wonderful natural resources—but it's all so undeveloped. I don't see how, with the lazy and irresponsible native labor, one could get anywhere. I have friends who have lost thousands in Mexican investments. And if you do make any money here, then a new government comes along, and you have to bribe the whole crew of them all over again, and it's pretty hard sledding no matter how you look at it."

"Doubtless you are right. But don't you like the Mexican people themselves—the simple people? They are well worth your sympathetic interest."

"I haven't got very well acquainted with them. I don't speak any Spanish, and there isn't one in a thousand of them that talks English."

"Yes, that does put you at a disadvantage," she agreed. "But why don't you make a start by talking, through an interpreter, with the Widow Sánchez? She is very witty, very well-informed about local conditions, and a very fine woman."

"I can't say I think so much of her hotel."

"It is, indeed, a little primitive—though several of my friends come back to it year after year and seem to find it pleasant. Won't you smoke, if you care to? I have no cigarettes to offer you, but doubtless you prefer your own brand."

He lighted one, and while doing so he looked the old lady over. Her black gown was rather handsome—not of the latest style but nice-looking just the same. Her white hair was arranged in an old-fashioned manner that agreeably framed her wrinkled forehead, funny black eyebrows, bright blue eyes and firm chin. Her throat was encircled by a black ribbon above the lace collar.

"You don't smoke yourself?" he asked, offering his package.

"No, thank you. Are you staying long in Mexico?"

"Not very long. I've got to get back to my office soon. We'll be leaving tomorrow—my wife and boy are with me."

"I hope you won't carry away too bad an impression of the Mexican people."

"Well, you know them a good deal better than I do—but my impression is that they're a pretty hopeless lot. Lazy, dirty, ignorant, irresponsible."

She looked at him for a moment in silence, as if collecting her thoughts before she spoke. The silence was interrupted by the entrance of the houseboy.

"*Señora, el Señor Castellano esta aqui.*"

"*Si, Pedro.*" She nodded to him, and then turned to Mr. Morton. "I have very few callers here, but an unusual pleasure was promised me for this evening. I was expecting a visit from Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, the distinguished poet and dramatist. He has come now. I am sure you will not find him ignorant or dirty. I hope you'll like him."

A tall lean man of sixty entered from the hallway. He was wearing a dinner-coat; his high collar was of the old-fashioned straight kind. Under his arm he carried a worn leather portfolio. His dark face was very Spanish-looking —thin, severe, emotional, imperious—rather like some Castilian grandee out of an old painting. His eyes were large and luminous, and he wore a trim Vandyke beard. He looked more like a surgeon than a poet. He crossed the room, bowed low before Mrs. Morton and kissed her hand.

Mrs. Morton rose. "Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, may I present to you Mr. Henry Clay Morton of New York."

The ascetic face of the poet lighted up. He spoke in perfect English as he shook hands.

"Ah, Mr. Morton, I am happy to meet you! I have many

American friends—chief among whom I prize the late Professor William James. Did you by any chance know him?"

"No, I don't think so. There are a lot of people in the United States—it's a big country."

Señor Castellano said: "Another of my famous American friends is Santayana. Of course, one is aware that he is not really an American—for his places of residence have been so varied in recent years—yet one still thinks of him as an American. It is reluctantly that we relinquish him to you: I wish Spain could claim him on the score of his half-Spanish blood! We were surprised to see him issue a novel in his old age, and even more surprised when it turned out to be—how do you say it?—a best-seller, isn't it?"

"I don't go in much for literary things," Mr. Morton said. "I'm too busy myself. My wife would probably know of him if he's a best-seller."

Conversation began to lag a little after that, and presently Señor Castellano said: "Señora, will you pardon me if I make a suggestion? Since the American gentleman understands no Spanish, we must not burden him with the little undertaking which you and I had agreed upon for this evening. I will come on another occasion, and bring the manuscript again."

"Certainly not, Señor," Mrs. Morton said firmly. "After your kindness in coming all this way for the express purpose of giving me this great pleasure? By no means! The American gentleman will at least enjoy the beautiful sound of your verse, which has moved so many thousand people, and I will from time to time explain to him the general purport of the plot as it develops."

She turned pleasantly to Mr. Morton. "Señor Castellano very kindly agreed to bring here the manuscript of his new blank verse play, *El Torbellino Fuerte*, and read it to me this evening. I can imagine no greater privilege than hearing it thus in private, where one is able to give it undistracted attention. And I think we had better begin at once. Please sit over there, Señor Castellano, where the light is good. Will you require a table for your manuscript? The small one at your right would serve."

Mr. Morton was appalled. With his best smile he said: "That's very kind of you. But I'm afraid I can't stay. You see, I just came out for a walk, and my wife expects me back at the hotel any minute now—and I don't want her to be worried."

"I'm sorry you can't stay," Mrs. Morton said graciously. "But I fully understand that you mustn't cause your wife anxiety, here in these foreign regions."

In a trio of polite formal farewells—like something on an opera stage, Mr. Morton thought—he departed. He found his way out to the courtyard and across it to the gate, where Plutarco awaited him. The pair started back to the Hotel Universal through the dark narrow streets.

Mr. Morton, feeling his way cautiously along the uneven coblestones, grinned as he realized what a laugh his wife would have on him when he told her of his adventure and of what a narrow escape he had had. Listening to a blank verse play in Spanish! That was a hot one!

Well, anyhow, this God-forsaken Chapala, the Widow Sánchez, little old Mrs. Morton, and the tall old poet with the Vandyke beard would be good for a story to tell back home.

At the hotel, Mr. Morton glanced about to see if the elderly English-looking man in knickerbockers was still in the lobby. Perhaps the vice-consul would have a drink with him and tell him something of business conditions in Mexico. But the lobby was empty; so Mr. Morton said goodnight to Plutarco and mounted the shabby stairs to his own quarters.

The absence of the vice-consul from the lobby was because he had long since retired for the night. He had put on a bathrobe and sandals, and was sitting at the wide open French window of his room upstairs, enjoying the comfort of a wicker chaise longue, a long mild whiskey-and-soda, and his mellow old briar pipe.

He smoked slowly and meditatively, though he was not really meditating on anything. His mind was a quiet garden of contentment and peace. He had not lighted a candle, for he did not want to attract the huge night-moths which were sure to dash in through the window and destroy their magnificent beauty in the flame. He merely sat there, breathing the calm night air and looking out at the twinkling stars and the wide unruffled surface of the lake.

Suddenly he said, as if he was forced to say it: "By Jove, what a heavenly spot! What a *heavenly* spot! Just like her to have had the sense to stay here!"

Then he rose, knocked out his pipe on the window-sill, and went to bed.

II

ROMANTIC LADY OF EIGHTY

MRS. SEYMOUR MORTON neither looked nor felt as old as her eighty years warranted. The vice-consul was renewedly aware of that as she greeted him. Her hands were slightly crippled by arthritis, and her back seemed to pain her at times; but she was the same brisk, skeptical, kindly woman she had always been. And if any of her faculties had failed her, her sense of humor was not one of them.

She stood there, a small erect woman with cloud-white hair, an alert face, and penetrating eyes. The white hair

was simply parted and drawn back in waves that framed her minutely wrinkled forehead, her bright blue eyes with their surprisingly black eyebrows, and her firm chin. She wore a dark dress with fine lace at the throat and wrists—vaguely reminiscent of some portrait of the demure lady of a dignified Sussex county squire. Her throat, decorously encircled by a black ribbon above the edge of the lace collar, was unconcealably the lean, stringy throat of an old woman.

The vice-consul had known her a long time. He was aware that she had little patience with captious, unimaginative persons. And he knew that on the other hand she was equally intolerant of sentimentality—the kind of sentimentality that leads a visitor in a foreign land to endow his surroundings with a haze of rainbow glamor through which no real object is distinctly seen.

"Romantic Mexico?" he had heard her say scoffingly to some acquaintance. "Romantic Mexico? Pish and tosh and a boiled owl! You've been reading the advertising folders for tourists. My three servants are more romantic and interesting than all the plotting generals and scowling bandits and languishing señoritas in the land! Have you never met my wonderful Pedro, my sacred Clara, and my God-smitten Chango? Then you don't know Mexico!"

She loved her tropical garden and her simple existence here on the edge of the great Lake Chapala. The beauty of the ever-changing water and of its mysterious surrounding mountains ruled her life; and she, in turn, ruled the lives of her matchless houseboy Pedro, her grave Madonna-like cook Clara, and her half-witted gardener Chango. They, like all the other people with whom she had dealings, re-

garded her with mingled apprehension and admiration: she could be as exacting on some occasions as she was generous on others. The villagers of Chapala laughed a little when they spoke of her, but there was more wonder than ridicule in their laughter.

She had lived here in Mexico for so many years since the death of her husband that she had almost forgotten the pain she had suffered when he died. But she never forgot the beauty of the lake nor the loveliness of her lakeside garden. Nor did she forget her sincere love for the Mexican people, the simple and humble and sometimes incomprehensible people, whose language she had learned to speak fluently and with whose hearts she could usually communicate. She had grown quite accustomed to living alone in her comfortable villa and occupying herself with gardening and reading and occasional calls from her few foreign neighbors; and she was perfectly happy.

Few intruders came to view Lake Chapala's long expanse of water—bounded by ribbed grey mountains, primitive villages, and stretches of bleak land where the cactus was at home. In its essentials, life here had not changed much since the first centuries of the Spanish Conquest, and many of the faces had the same aquiline profiles that appear on the mortuary figures found in the tombs of the prehistoric races. Few of the adults could read or write. In the narrow cobbled streets of the town the only moving figures were peasants from the countryside, burros laden with firewood or charcoal or pottery, market people, strolling musicians, shawled women, and perhaps an occasional drunken cavalier flashing by with jingled silver spurs.

The stucco-walled Villa Colima stood on a lakeside

promontory a little outside the town, in a region where the cobbled streets began to change to dusty country roads. Peasants going to market with their wares and produce would look up at Mrs. Morton's gate; they all knew her. After her many years of residence here, they had come to accept her as one of the natural phenomena of the region, just as they accepted sun and storm and the Holy Virgin and bandits.

(2)

She received the vice-consul on the terrace overlooking the garden and the lake.

"It is good of you to come. Another little vacation of yours?"

"Yes. I am so glad to have the Widow's to come to. The grind of the office gets me down a bit sometimes."

"Did you see Señor Castellano down there? I think he was spending the night, and going back today."

"I saw him just for a moment. He seemed very flourishing. A most charming man!"

"Did he tell you about last night?"

"He said something about your American visitor; and he told me that he had read his new play to you, and that you seemed to think rather well of it."

"Rather well of it! It's tremendous—tremendous, you hear me? That man makes me furious! Here he is—one of the most distinguished poets in the world—and he talks as if he were a modest little schoolboy. When I tell him that I think his play magnificent, he talks as if he couldn't believe it. I know, I know, that all really great men are supposed to be modest—but he carries modesty too far—

entirely too far. And as if my opinion were worth anything, anyway!"

"He thinks it is. He esteems your opinion very highly indeed. If you were to ask me, I should say that I think he was very deeply moved by your approval."

"That great man! He ought to know better. If I had been his mother or his aunt, I'd have taken my stick to him when he was young! I'd not let him be so humble! I'd teach him not to pretend that he is just an ordinary mortal!"

"I'm sure that a good birching would be a very effective way to foster anyone's pride," the vice-consul said smoothly. "Have you ever tried it on Don Enrique?"

She shot a brief flashing glance at him: then she smiled. "You know even less about great poets than I do——so don't give me any of your sarcastic advice. Come——let's walk in the garden. The house is haunted for me today with the memory of that terrific poetry I heard last night——and I want to forget it for a while."

They walked down the steps into the garden and strolled along the winding graveled paths between the carefully tended flower beds. Descending the gentle slope, they at last paused close to the shore of the lake. She shook her head in disapproval as she pointed her black ebony cane at a rude adobe hovel near the water's edge.

"That must go! I have not been satisfied with it for a long time——and I've tried to forget it instead of doing something about it. But now, seeing it with you, I'm ashamed of myself."

"What is it, a tool house?"

"That is where I lodge my sweet gardener, Chango. I don't care if he is more like a pig or a monkey than a hu-

man being: he is such a gentle affectionate pig or such an unmalicious monkey—take it either way you like—that he deserves something better than that. Why, it does look almost like a dog kennel!"

The vice-consul laughed. "It seems that my memory goes farther back than yours does, Mrs. Morton. I used to visit Sir John Murdoch here, twenty-odd years ago; and now I recall that this hut was in actual fact used as a dog kennel in his day!"

"Was it really? Was it really? Poor Sir John! He got into trouble with the Home Government—about drink, wasn't it?—or was it something about a woman? I forget now: at any rate, it doesn't matter. It happened a long time ago; and he is dead, and I am old and can forgive trifles. And I always liked his manners. Certainly the wind that blew him ill blew good to my husband, for Sir John would never have sold this place if he hadn't been recalled. I do like it enormously, don't you?"

"When I say that I think it almost the equal of its mistress, I shall have answered your question, Mrs. Morton."

"How Spanish you are growing in your manners! I'm not sure I think it becomes you." She moved onward, glancing about her at the palms, the pepper trees and the mangoes, and back toward the terrace above, from which profuse vines of bougainvillea mounted upward in an inverted cascade of blossoms. Turning again, she looked out at the lake and the circle of grey-gold mountains, and shook herself as if attempting to emerge from a dream of the past.

At last she said: "How poor Sir John hated the Mexican people!"

"But you don't? You never have?"

"I don't what? Hate the Mexicans? Gracious, no; I love them. I have been perfectly happy among them, all these years."

The vice-consul nodded sympathetically. He himself had never been able to feel entirely at home in Mexico: he could not put himself into harmony with the swift emotional tides that swept these people, in whose blood the strains of ancient Indian and Spanish inheritance were mingled in mysterious combinations. He envied Mrs. Morton her power to accept the turbulent Mexican tempo.

"Now," she said, turning away from the lake and starting up one of the garden paths, "now come and help me decide where to build a little adobe hut for Chango. Poor Chango! His name, you know, means 'monkey.' But it doesn't mean 'dog'; and he shall no longer inhabit a dog kennel."

They walked through the richly-colored garden, mounted the steps to the terrace, and entered the villa. Passing through the living-room, where Victorian sets of standard books vied for space on the shelves with modern paper-jacketed volumes, they emerged into the stone-paved courtyard. Here along two sides of the open space extended the ten-foot wall that enclosed the property; on the other two sides rose the various rooms of the dwelling. Beyond the kitchen, at the end of a row of pantries and woodsheds, was an unoccupied plot of ground. To this Mrs. Morton pointed with her stick.

"That place will do, don't you think?"

"Nothing could be more suitable."

"Pedro!" called out Mrs. Morton in her quavering old voice. "Pedro, come here, please."

Pedro, immaculate in his white houseboy's uniform and brown sandals, appeared instantly from the kitchen. He was a well-built young fellow, with keen black eyes and ruddy brown skin and full pleasant lips. The vice-consul nodded to him with a smile. Pedro, the paragon of all the houseboys of Chapala, had been known to the English gentleman for many years as Mrs. Morton's indispensable guard, butler, page and factotum.

"Pedro—here, you see? I want a room built for Chango. That hole of his down by the lake is not fit for anybody. A nice little room can be made here for him, with a door and a window. Have it built at once. If you get three men, and if Chango helps, it will take only a week."

Pedro looked doubtful. "But Señora—Chango will not like it."

"Why not? Why not?"

"This place will be too clean for him. He is so dirty that he does not feel at home in clean places. And besides, he thinks that they are not healthy. And this is very close to the house—and on Saturdays, when he gets drunk, he likes to have a place way off by himself where he can snore and sing."

"Oh, I'll wager anything that he'll be as pleased as Punch!" Mrs. Morton said to the vice-consul, who was watching with amusement her annoyance as these secrets of her household were being betrayed. "No new events ever happen inside our garden wall, and this will give him something fresh to think about. And perhaps if he knows that I notice each time he gets drunk, he will confine himself to his regular once-a-week debauch. I simply won't have him going down to the *cantina* except on Saturdays."

"Is he to have a cot-bed here?" Pedro asked.

"Certainly! I won't have a gardener of mine sleeping on the floor like a savage." Mrs. Morton well knew that not one out of twenty of the peasants around the lake had a bed or cared to have one; but Chango's pleas that he might be allowed to sleep on the earthen floor had always met with a firm refusal from her. "You understand, Pedro?"

Pedro nodded respectfully and disappeared.

"Pedro is perfect," Mrs. Morton said. "A week from now, the room will be finished. He never fails. I don't know what I would do without him."

"A great servant, and a great mistress!" the vice-consul said gallantly.

"Stop being Spanish! I don't like it in you. Now come out onto the terrace and I will give you your tea."

She led him through the hallway and onto the terrace. "Isn't it beautifully quiet! Nothing ever happens here," she said as she looked down with satisfaction on her small domain.

(3)

The week passed, and Mrs. Morton's prophecy proved to be correct.

On the evening of exactly the seventh day after Pedro had received Mrs. Morton's instructions, he lingered portentously in the dining-room after he had finished serving her dinner, and said: "Señora, the room for the gardener was completed this afternoon. Would the Señora wish to come and see it?"

"Certainly! Bring me my stick!" She rose and walked down the dark hall, with Pedro following after her. Out-

side the door she found Chango waiting expectantly in all the confusion of his dirty rags and battered straw hat. His bare feet wriggled and shifted with embarrassed excitement. He took off his hat and bowed with humble respect.

"Good evening, Chango. Well, great things have been happening, haven't they?"

"My domicile," he mumbled, with childlike pride in his eyes. "The Señora will look at my domicile? Pedro says I can move in tomorrow. Does the Señora say that I may?"

"Surely, Chango." She wondered just what elaborate preparations he was making for the ceremony of moving in; to her certain knowledge, his only possessions down in the dog house were a blanket and a small crucifix. "How do you like your new place?"

His grin widened into an ape-like foolishness. He nodded his head vigorously many times.

Dusk was falling quietly upon the stone-paved patio as Mrs. Morton, followed by the brisk Pedro and the shambling Chango, stepped across the flags and approached the newly-completed adobe hut. She peered within. There was nothing to see—merely the neat earthen interior, one window, a pine table, a chair, a candlestick, a blanket, and a cot-bed.

"I bought them all new," Pedro whispered. "Chango's are full of fleas."

"Very nice," she said. "Very nice indeed."

"My domicile," Chango repeated with pride. "My domicile."

He had evidently taken a great fancy to the word. Mrs. Morton wondered where he had got hold of it. Perhaps he had heard the sonorous name used in church by the priest

—doubtless in reference to a more celestial habitation than this one.

"Yes, your domicile," she said. "And see that you keep it clean!" Chango grinned sheepishly. "And don't get drunk more often than once a week! You hear me?"

Chango's grin widened into even more amiable foolishness and respect. He bowed several times, and then shambled off in the direction of the old dog kennel that had for so many years been his shelter.

"The Señora was right," Pedro remarked. "He likes it. He asked me if I would give him a broken glass from the table so he can always keep a flower in it and make his house look like a rich person's house."

"Oh, don't give him a broken glass; give him one of those old blue vases from the upper hall. Give him both of them."

"He will think he is in heaven then!"

She smiled, and turned away from the patio. Poor Chango! Often a pain stabbed her heart when she thought of his pathetically limited world of experience—where, as in a child's world, there were probably no intermediate gradations between intense joy and intense grief, and where a trifle could cause either one of these emotions to possess the soul completely.

Reentering the house, she passed through the hall and out onto the wide terrace that overlooked the palms in her garden and the expanse of the twilit lake, and settled herself placidly in an arm-chair for an interval of aimless meditation. On some evenings she sat in the living-room under the lamplight and read her favorite writers, Jane Austen or Mrs. Humphrey Ward or Gibbon, or even some foolish modern detective story; on other evenings she was content

to remain here on the terrace the whole evening long, watching the last traces of the sunset above the slowly darkening water and the growing brightness of the infinite-numbered stars. The grandeur of silence did not frighten her; passivity did not repel her; having had a full and active life, and being tired now, the tranquillity of old age in these benign surroundings held nothing distasteful to her; she enjoyed the peace of nature and the richness of reflective memory.

She had seen so much: the quiet English village of her youth, the fantastic Burma where her husband was employed as a mining engineer during the early period of her marriage, and then the Mexico of her last thirty years. There had been many trials, many ups and downs of fortune, even some real poverty; but nothing cruel or wicked had happened to poison her recollection. She had enjoyed it all. Now her dead husband, her grown-up children, and her vigorous grandchildren were all equally real and alive in her memory. She knew that the years that lay ahead of her could not be many, and she did not believe a word that the churches said about a Future Life; but she looked toward the mysterious adventure of death without fear. It was a breath-taking adventure to contemplate; but since nothing was known about it, why should she bedeck it with the gloom of imagined terrors? For all she knew, it might be an experience of utter delight. She would wait and see. And until death came for her, she would meekly walk in her own path in the cool of the evening; and no new event could ever again disturb the tranquillity of her walled garden and her meditative twilights.

She noted tonight with renewed wonder how numerous and how bright the stars were in the vastness of the sky.

(4)

The approach of Pedro's footsteps brought her thoughts back to the earth. He came quietly through the living-room and stood before her. He did not speak.

"What is it, Pedro? I didn't forget to give you the money for the household accounts today, did I?"

"Señora, there is a strange man at the gate."

"Not that tourist again?"

"Oh, no, Señora."

"Well, who is he? What does he want? Why do you act so queerly about it?"

"He is a big, fierce man. He says he must see you. I told him to go away and come back tomorrow. He will not go away. He says he cannot wait. This is no time for an honest man to come! I think he is a bandit or some kind of a wicked madman. Shall I keep talking to him, and send Chango by the lakeside gate to fetch the soldiers?"

"Of course not. Bring him in."

"But, Señora . . ."

"Don't be silly. Just a man? You act as if it were a mountain lion. Bring him in."

Pedro shook his head mournfully, but went obediently away. Mrs. Morton heard the bar of the outer gate clang down, and then the squeak of the hinges. "I must attend to those hinges!" she thought impatiently. "I must surely try to remember tomorrow to tell Chango to oil them: they are a disgrace."

Pedro returned, leading a tall heavy man whose drooping straw hat, ragged white trousers and close-drawn blanket were precisely like those of every other indigent peasant in Mexico. He touched his hat humbly, and peered out from under the brim; but to Mrs. Morton's astonishment he did not remove it from his head. Most of the peasants had admirable manners, and would no more keep their hats on in a lady's house than in a church. She fixed him impatiently with her sharp eyes, determined to stare down his deliberate impertinence. He looked steadily back, and neither flinched nor removed his overshadowing head-covering.

After a moment of silence, Mrs. Morton gave a slight start. Then she said slowly: "Pedro, you may go. I will talk with this man."

Slowly and reluctantly, Pedro obeyed. He turned and entered the living-room. Mrs. Morton waited until he had had time to pass through it and until she heard the unmistakable sound of the closing of the kitchen door behind him.

Then she rose from her chair and held out her hand to the man.

"General Hernando Gonzales, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

The man's hat was off instantly, in a great flourish. He stood, tall and formal, apparently unaware of his grotesque rags and his dust-covered face.

"Señora Morton, I am overcome with humiliation that my first call on you should be made at so unconventional an hour. And I am regretful that my desperate need forces me to confess at once that I have come to ask an unprece-

dented favor of you." He paused dramatically. "I have come to ask you for my life." Abruptly he stopped.

Mrs. Morton motioned toward a chair. "Sit down please, General Gonzales. Let us talk this over. Tell me what is the matter, and what I can do for you."

They sat down, facing each other on the silent terrace under the stars. A little light that streamed out from the living-room enabled Mrs. Morton to see her visitor's face clearly.

She looked with curiosity at the powerful aquiline Aztec features—this face of a man of action, not a philosopher. His four days' growth of beard made him uncouth and unattractive, but it did not conceal from her either his identity or the strength of his personality.

The last time she had seen him was several years ago. It had been at a formal dinner in Mexico City, where he had appeared in all the suave glory of his military uniform and blazing decorations. By some chance she was placed next to him at the gold-and-flower-laden table. She knew who he was; she had watched with idle interest his growth from a ruthless politician of Guadalajara into key-positions of ever-increasing importance—until at last, as Secretary of War, he loomed high on the horizon of the future as the possible Dictator of Mexico. Such he seemed to her on the evening of the dinner. In the midst of a fashionable company he talked to her with decisive and fluent eloquence —never doubtful of himself, never less than the Great Man of his own dreams. And she judged it to be an additional mark to the credit of his sincerity that he would take the trouble to speak so intently to an old and by no means

beautiful woman such as herself. She had an extremely good time that night.

Yet the fact that she had once enjoyed that evening, with the powerful Secretary of War making her conspicuous by the studied attentions he was paying her—all that seemed an odd prelude to receiving an unshaven General Gonzales, in the rags of a peasant, here on the shores of Lake Chapala.

The fantastic comedy of it struck her, and she smiled. "You are welcome, *Señor Ministro*," she said, going back to the form of address that was correct when she last saw him. "You are welcome, especially to that particular chair in which you are sitting. You are not the first man of eminence to occupy it. My dear and terrifying friend, President Porfirio Díaz—he whose summer home was only a little way down the lake—he always sat in it when he visited me. Ah, the great Don Porfirio! I detested his political ideas—but what a man! He is dead now." . . . Her reminiscent mind left the present moment for an instant as she saw the brilliant black eyes and iron jaw of Díaz there on the terrace before her. Then she returned to reality with a laugh. "But I can assure you, General Gonzales, that when Don Porfirio called on me, he presented a more fashionable appearance than you do now!"

She had hoped to put him at his ease by the triviality of her remark. But the man was too intent upon the present moment to be able to relax into a smile.

"Señora, I am in deep distress. I am fleeing for my life. I will not trouble you with the details of how it came about: suffice it to say that the plots against me have succeeded, my troops turned hostile to me, and nothing re-

mained. You see me in complete downfall: there is not a more unhappy man on earth than I am. There was a time when my hopes were high—when, as Secretary of War, I aspired to still greater office and dreamed of following in the footsteps of the immortal Díaz and becoming the savior of my beloved country. All that is ended. Three days ago I fled from Mexico City, leaving false clues to indicate that I had gone toward Veracruz, as if on my way to Paris; instead, I came in this disguise to this remote region, to conceal myself until the pursuit is over and I can make my escape from the country. It was only this afternoon, as I looked out perplexed at the lake and wondered where I could find refuge, that I remembered you lived here, in your gracious seclusion."

He stopped, and waved his hand as if he had said everything.

"And you want me to receive you here as my guest, Señor?" Mrs. Morton asked a little brusquely. "A political refugee? But you know that I do not concern myself with politics or revolutions or anything else that goes on at the Capital. I have never done so. If I had, I would have been asked to leave Mexico long ago."

"I know well, Señora Morton, that you do not. Everyone knows that. That is why . . ."

"Yes, I see. But aren't you aware that your request puts me in a very embarrassing position?"

The General made a sweeping gesture. "Ah, Señora, your unblemished reputation, as a model to all the virtuous ladies of Mexico, makes it impossible that the tongue of scandal should dare to touch your distinguished beauty, flawless dignity and sublime morality."

Mrs. Morton smiled inwardly. It had been many a year since she had thought of herself as a prize coveted by amorous males; and she was now less pleased than astonished by the General's seriously-uttered compliment to her eighty-year-old seductiveness. What Englishman could be so flattering, so fantastic and so foolish? None. Only a Mexican general could invent such a train of thought.

"We won't worry about my moral reputation," she said. "It was not that of which I was thinking. But how about your being found here, and my being taken out and shot at dawn by your political enemies?"

His face darkened a little. "Señora, I beg you to do me the justice to realize that I reflected long on that point before I decided to come to you with my appeal. And it is my profound conviction that there would be no danger to you. No one knows that I have the honor of your friendship; we have met only once or twice; and if by some incredible chance my presence here should be discovered, it would be instantly clear to everyone that no blame could fall upon you. You need not be aware who I am. With this growth of beard and these clothes, you naturally could not be expected to recognize me. Let my name be Antonio —a poor vagabond to whom you graciously gave a few days of employment in your garden when he appeared, hungry and friendless and a stranger at your gate. No one will ever dream of searching for me behind your garden-walls. But if the soldiers should come and find me, how can you be blamed for the deception which this pretended Antonio has practiced on your compassionate and unsuspicious nature?"

In spite of his confident words, she could see that he was

deeply embarrassed by his consciousness of the greatness of the service which he was asking her to render him. But she felt that his line of reasoning was perfectly correct. There would be almost no danger to her if she let him stay. On his way hither from Mexico City he had, of course, passed hundreds,—yes, thousands,—of people who had failed to recognize this famous man in his disguise: and how could anyone reasonably expect her to be more acutely observing than his own fellow countrymen had been? No, there was little peril to her. And now that he was actually here, sitting on her terrace, some streak of wilfulness in her nature made her decide that she would not permit him to be captured and shot. To shoot interesting people was absurd. And though she did not know just why, she realized that she liked this preposterous man.

Instantly she made up her mind. She spoke quietly and with authority.

"Very well, Antonio. You are now my assistant-gardener. I hope you are an honest man and a hard worker. I will pay you five pesos a week and your food and lodging. If you get drunk except on Saturdays and Sundays, I shall discharge you. You will sleep in the nice new little hut I have just built for my gardener."

He stared at her, deeply moved. He had not yet exhausted half his arguments, and he was not prepared for such immediate yielding to his exorbitant request. He attempted to speak, but surprise and relief choked his utterance. He bowed his head, in speechless admiration.

"Pedro! Pedro!" she called out. Pedro heard her at once; he came swiftly through the house and out onto the terrace. Mrs. Morton noted with wry amusement that he was

carrying a heavy wooden club concealed behind his back. General Gonzales had already risen, put on his wide straw hat, and assumed his original slouching posture.

"Pedro, I find that this man, though ignorant and not very polite, is a well-meaning, honest fellow. His name is Antonio. I have hired him to help Chango for a few days; he needs the work; he is a stranger. Give him Chango's new room; Chango can stay a little longer in his old dog house. That is all. Now take Antonio away and show him where he is to sleep. Tomorrow Chango can teach him his work. Good-night to you both."

Pedro gave no outward sign of his feelings. He merely nodded his head respectfully to Mrs. Morton, and said somberly to Antonio: "God be with you! Come along, man; I will show you where to lay down your carcass. Good-night, Señora."

The two men shuffled away. Mrs. Morton stood looking out at the dark lake and the brilliant stars. Well! this was an unexpected interruption of her peace. What curious things did happen in this world!

She went to bed after a little while, smiling at her own absurdity in taking in this refugee. The whole thing was too ridiculous for belief.

(5)

In the morning she sent first for Chango. His face, no matter what the occasion, always wore the endearing aspect of a puzzled child. She told him as gently as she could that it would be a few days before he could move into his "domicile." She had feared that he would be much grieved

by the postponement; but he gave no sign of discontent. He merely shuffled his bare feet and smiled his sweet senseless smile. Doubtless he was too well accustomed by this time to the mysterious ways of God and the weather and Mrs. Morton to be disturbed by small surprises.

Then she sent for Clara. Something would have to be said to Clara about this new member of the household. It would be a little difficult to do this; for Clara, unlike poor Chango, was anything but a fool.

Clara had remained, from the first hour of their meeting, an unchanging mystery to Mrs. Morton. In all the twelve years during which they had lived in the same house and the one had cooked for the other, Mrs. Morton had never looked at Clara without feeling a faint sense of awe. Clara was of an age that might be anywhere between thirty and fifty: she was tall, dark-haired, with finely-moulded lips and brow, and eyes in whose beautiful depths the sorrows of all the ages seemed to lie hidden. She carried herself with the sad dignity of a Madonna or an exiled Indian princess: Mrs. Morton often wondered whether there did not run in her veins the blood of that immortal girl Malinche, who left her people and became the mistress and strategical adviser of Hernando Cortés during the tremendous days of the Conquest. Clara's voice was low and full of rich tones, and she had been born with the gift of deep human wisdom. Wholly uneducated, never in her life departing from the little lakeside town of Chapala, she yet had the composure and poise of a great lady who would be at home in any society anywhere in the world. Her silences sometimes, Mrs. Morton thought, had the grandeur of the Pyramids of Egypt.

"Clara—this new gardener—I hope you will be kind to him."

"Surely, Señora."

"Do you like him?"

"He seems courteous, Señora, and wishful to cause no trouble; and he is very clean."

"You see, Clara, he is a queer, proud fellow; there is no doubt that he has seen better days and is now in misfortune. I asked him no questions, but" . . . She hesitated.

"No, Señora, one would naturally not ask questions that might be embarrassing to another person."

Mrs. Morton blinked for an instant. She was not entirely sure whether Clara was delicately complimenting her mistress on her graciousness in not cross-examining a poor fellow who was out of luck—or whether Clara was conveying with equal delicacy the assurance that Mrs. Morton need have no fear that she herself would be cross-examined by Clara, no matter what shameless lie she chose to tell about Antonio. It was quite possible that Clara already had suspicions. However, it did not matter; for Clara's loyalty was a rock to build cathedrals on.

"Well, be that as it may," Mrs. Morton went on, "I would like to have you pay a little special attention to his food. He is not like most of the workmen. Our good Chango—he does not know what he eats, just so he gets enough. He would chew up fried bats, bones and leather-wings and all, if such a dish were put before him." . . .

"The Señora has spoken God's own truth!" Clara smiled. . . . "but this man needs some of your nice nourishing cooking such as you give to me. And I shall not mind a bit if your bills for supplies go up a little while he is here."

"I shall try to please you, Señora."

"You always please me, Clara."

Clara departed, her grave and noble manner trailing after her like a robe of ceremony. And from that time on, Mrs. Morton noted that her cook always ordered an extra portion of special delicacies, such as the delicious tiny wild-doves that were comparatively rare and expensive; and she felt sure that these luxuries were not being served to Chango.

Mrs. Morton was very fond of the best imported Russian caviare; but it was too costly to have often, and on the infrequent occasions when it was served to her, one small tin always lasted for two meals. Now, after a day when Clara had given her caviare for dinner, she noted that none was forthcoming on the next day. The thought of Clara serving caviare to a mere workman was impossible. Mrs. Morton knew at once that Clara understood at least the essence of the whole situation. But they exchanged no words on the subject.

Antonio proved to be an utterly incompetent gardener. Mrs. Morton wondered how even a politician and soldier could have grown up in such abject ignorance of horticulture. The man did not know a flower from a weed. When he attempted to prune a tree, he clipped just the twigs which he should carefully have spared and left the undesirable ones untouched. His idea of keeping a graveled garden-path in order was to pick up a few large pebbles and hurl them moodily into the lake. Even Chango, too thick-witted to be aware of much, became disgusted and gave up the attempt he had made at the start to instruct his new assistant.

On the third day, encountering Mrs. Morton on one of the garden-paths, he voiced his only protest.

"Antonio, he is not good gardener." Chango shook his head sadly.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Not good gardener. He afraid to let scorpion sting him."

"Well, so are most people. What of it?"

"I show the Señora, good gardener not afraid!" Chango's eye had been caught by something. He made a sudden dart toward a clump of lilies and emerged with a small, wriggling and very angry scorpion in his hand.

"Not hurt me!" he said triumphantly, grinning his foolish smile. He held out both hands toward her and was about to let the little monster sting the back of his left wrist with its furiously lashing tail.

"Chango! throw that away! Haven't I told you often enough that I will discharge you if you ever again do that horrid thing in my presence?" Mrs. Morton knew well that Chango had somehow acquired a complete immunity to scorpion-poison, and that the venom of even a very large scorpion, enough to kill or disable an ordinary man, did not affect him at all. But he had demonstrated his proud gift quite often enough for her tastes.

Chango reluctantly tossed the bewildered little scorpion back into its native jungle.

"Antonio not good gardener," he repeated, and grinned foolishly.

"Never you mind about Antonio," Mrs. Morton said firmly. "You just attend to your own work, and don't bother about what he does. You are the real gardener, you

know," she went on conciliatingly. "Not everybody can understand gardens the way you do. It's a gift from heaven."

Chango departed in an ecstasy of flattered pride. He had already forgotten the scorpion and Antonio.

Thereafter Mrs. Morton often looked down from her terrace and smiled dryly as she saw Chango, barefooted and dirty, struggling up the paths with two buckets of water slung from a pole that weighed heavily on his shoulders; while Antonio, seated on a rock beside the lake-edge, seemed plunged in endless hours of profound and melancholy thought. She wondered whether he was posing so melodramatically for her benefit; but she did not bother to take any kodak-pictures of this later-day Napoleon at Elba.

On the contrary, it was with a little evil glee that on Saturday, in the presence of the other servants when she was paying them their wages, she handed to Antonio his five silver pesos. "Your week's pay," she said. He stared at her, dumbfounded and angry—but his position left him no escape, and he took the money as in a dream. Obviously he had forgotten all about the five pesos; but she had not. This episode pleased her very much: it was worth much more than five pesos to her. She went away chuckling.

The trusted Pedro was persistently silent about the matter of the assistant-gardener. Instantly conscious though he always was of the slightest happening that concerned Mrs. Morton's welfare, he now feigned an utter blindness to the existence of Antonio.

After a few days, he apparently could endure his silence no longer. One afternoon he came out onto the terrace

where Mrs. Morton sat; his young face was frowning like a storm gathering over the lake. He said:

"Señora, do you know who that man is?"

"Who? Antonio?"

"Antonio! Antonio! That man is no Antonio! That man has never touched a spade in his life. He is no gardener: he is some great and powerful *politico* who will destroy us. O Señora, I pray in the name of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Christopher that you will send him away!"

Tears were in his eyes and his face was drawn with apprehension. She knew why he was so moved: it was not for his own sake. She looked at him gravely.

"Pedro," she said, "our little villa is our castle, is it not? Nobody will come here. You are discreet; you do not talk to outsiders of our affairs when you go to the town. And Clara never gossips about us. But Chango—he gets drunk and chatters—and he might say almost anything then. Will you tell Chango that I say he must not go outside the gate on Saturday—and will you go out and buy his horrible cinnamon-and-alcohol for him? Then he can get drunk here and stay here. I say that he may—and he may sing and snore as much as he likes."

Pedro stared at Mrs. Morton in amazement. She had never before permitted Chango to touch liquor inside her gates; indeed, it was well understood by everybody that if he once violated this prohibition, he would have to go away. Pedro could not believe his ears. Then a great light dawned on him.

"Señora—this terrible señor is your friend?"

"He is my friend."

Pedro bowed his head and turned away in silence. And

on Saturday afternoon he went out, locked the gate from the outside, and fetched Chango his bottle of raucous liquor. And throughout Sunday he kept a careful eye on the dog hut while the simple gardener slept and sang and snored.

But he avoided Antonio as he would the plague.

(6)

As the days passed, Mrs. Morton's original sense of bland security became modified by a subtle uneasiness. Though no untoward event occurred—not the slightest ripple of anything suspicious—still she found herself waiting for something to happen. There was a tense hushed air over the garden-paths. Perhaps it was that Pedro's apprehensiveness was communicating itself to her through vague psychic channels; perhaps it was her common sense that told her the presence of a strange man in her garden might eventually be noted by some of the village fishermen who sailed their black-beaked craft up and down the lake daily, or that the news might spread in some other simple though unpredictable way. Any one of a thousand small accidents—such as a child tossing a ball over the wall and scrambling in to reclaim it—might give public tongue to the secret.

And in such case, she was rather doubtful whether her specious plea of ignorance of General Gonzales' identity would save her. If he were discovered in her garden, that story would not sound any too well. A newly-arrived foreigner might be believed if he said that he had supposed this man to be only a poor and harmless peasant; but she, after her many years in Mexico and with her fluent knowledge of the language, would find it hard to convince a

skeptical questioner that she had not noticed her guest's distinguished manner of speaking and his aristocratic bearing. No, she was not in a comfortable position. She did not think it probable that General Gonzales' political enemies would go so far as to shoot her if he were found here; but nothing was more likely than that they might decide to confiscate her property and banish her from Mexico—a possibility too awful to contemplate.

She grew angry and cursed herself as a romantic fool for ever having consented to his staying here. Why had she been so soft-hearted as to give this utter stranger the cloak of her inadequate protection? If she had a particle of sense, she would tell him this very day to get up and take himself elsewhere. Goodness gracious! was her peaceful garden to be made a place of refuge for all the political revolutionaries and adventurers of Mexico?

Yet now that she had once actually admitted him to her garden, she had a faint sense of proprietorship over him. She recognized her feeling as being a ridiculous survival of feudal days, when service and protection were the reciprocal duties of vassal and lord. Of course this obnoxious man wasn't her vassal, and she wasn't his liege-protector. Nevertheless some element of stubborn pride in her character made her unwilling to change her original decision.

"Oh, pish and tosh and a boiled owl!" she said to herself impatiently. "I'll keep him. Everything will be all right. And I can't in decency throw the man out, now that I have once let him in!"

So she did nothing—although it made her uncomfortable to realize that if the soldiers actually came for her famous guest, she could do nothing to protect or conceal him.

There were no possible hiding-places inside the house—no secret passageways or subterranean tunnels or sliding panels or dark crypts—nothing whatsoever that would serve as proper stage-scenery for a melodrama. As for the garden, it was as open to the eye as a billiard-table. Escape by means of the lake? Absurd: she hadn't even a boat. No, if the General chose to stay, she could be of no help to him in the hour of crisis.

(7)

Her personal relations with her distinguished visitor were simplified by his tact and prudence. He observed the requirements of his rôle with meticulous care. He ate his meals in the kitchen, slept in Chango's new "domicile," and on the rare occasions when he and his hostess met on the garden-paths, he stood respectfully aside in silence and lifted his battered straw hat as she passed. She bowed patronizingly, tossed him the usual greeting of "God be with you, Antonio!" and went on. Her wrinkled old lips would twist into an ironic smile for a moment afterward. The great man did indeed present a slightly amusing picture in his present disguise. She found it hard to believe that so grotesque a situation could actually exist, and that it was actually happening to her of all people.

During this romantic period of her life, Mrs. Morton remained wholly unmoved by the romance of it. She had read *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Monte Cristo* and Richard Harding Davis' stories of plots and plotters and adventures; but she much preferred the more factual narratives of Jane Austen and Thackeray and Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Though she was aware that the present situation was dramatic and

that her guest was in momentary peril of his life, still she could not bring herself to view the matter in terms of grand opera. General Gonzales was to her no hero; none of these *politicos* were; they were all of them mere commonplace, ambitious, boastful men, hungry for power and money, and completely ignorant of ideas of good and evil. They were up one day and down the next. They risked their lives, to be sure—but so does every truck driver. Mrs. Morton detected no trace of glamor in the whole lot of them.

She thought a little shamefacedly of what her friend the British vice-consul would think and say if he knew of her present rashness. The calm expressionless furrows of his lean face would tighten into a more-than-British severity and the firm line of his mouth would grow even a little straighter than it usually was. He would remark: "Of course, you must be quite aware that I deplore the step you have taken, and that officially I can have no knowledge of the matter. However, if you get into trouble, you had better wire me, saying merely 'Birthday greetings,'—I shall understand, and will pull what wires I can for you. But it will take some time to do that—and I strongly advise you to carry several tins of insect-powder with you if you are taken to jail. I hear that the jails are not attractive." How he would dislike having any connection with this preposterous situation!

And, further, she reflected with a wry face on Señor Castellano's probable reactions to such an episode as this. He would, in the first instance, be utterly horrified by the thought of her being in the hands of the police: she wondered whether, if she were indeed arrested, his quixotic

chivalry might not be extreme enough to impel him to seize one of the ancient lances that hung in the dusky hallway of his house and ride forth on a requisitioned dray-horse to charge the jail and deliver her from bondage. But it was not this improbable possibility that disturbed her: it was, rather, his sober unspoken judgment that she dreaded. She felt sure that his aristocratic mind would regard her participation in these affairs as a grievous error. She remembered a remark he had once made: "It is not the true visionary, but the person lacking in clarity of vision, who confuses romance with reality. Either romance or reality, when pure, is innocent; but when mixed blindly, they make a devil's brew." She feared that Señor Castellano, though too courteous to express his real feelings, would look with sorrowful disapproval on this whole episode—from the first moment of its impulsive inception on the evening of General Gonzales' arrival to the final and at-present-unforeseeable moment that would mark its ending.

Yet she did not care what the views of her old friends might be. Somehow she liked General Gonzales, and wished him well, and was willing to be slightly absurd in letting him stay here. When, at moments, she reproached herself for her unromantic view of him, she would try to recover her self-esteem by telling herself that, though the General was not a very romantic figure, nevertheless she herself was one: she was risking a good deal in doing him this service.

Her uncomfortableness persisted. She was, in fact, in an emotional quandary. Here she was, playing a dangerous heroine's rôle in a genuinely dramatic situation—yet all the time she felt it to be mere vulgar melodrama, with no

moral issue and nothing but money and power and foolish pretentious lives at stake. These men called themselves generals, and dressed themselves up in uniforms and medals and pearl-handled revolvers whose showiness would revolt the taste of an honest demi-mondaine: they were juvenile in their mental development. In other respects, they did not differ from the predatory politicians and financiers of France and the United States and Italy and her own beloved Britain. They were a greedy, ignorant, sorry lot.

Why had she ever disturbed her tranquil household and her beloved garden by admitting this man? She was a fool, that was all: she was an old fool!

It was a sad conviction for a romantic heroine to come to.

(8)

One sunny day as she was walking in the garden, she encountered her guest. As usual he doffed his disgraceful straw hat and stood respectfully aside to let her pass. Contrary to her wont, she paused, glanced about to make sure that no one was watching them, and said:

"Well, Antonio, from what I have observed of your labors in the past, I don't think the garden will suffer much if you take a little rest. Let's sit down here."

Beside a secluded garden-path rose a huge mango tree. Under it stood a carved marble bench with scrolled arms and high back—a handsome object that had doubtless been brought from Spain many centuries ago to grace the terraces of some nobleman who had come to the New World to rule part of this land of gold. The drooping branches of the tree completely concealed the nook from

possible observation by fishermen in the boats that might be passing to and fro on the lake.

Mrs. Morton led the way to the seat. Antonio followed her with an expression of pleasure on his face. He at once ceased to be Antonio, as if his old-time uniform had by some sudden miracle replaced his rags.

"How are you getting on, General Gonzales?" she asked. "I am sorry I can't ask you to dine with me these evenings; there is nothing I should enjoy more than your company. But obviously it would be too dangerous for you."

"Gracious Señora, there is nothing you could possibly do to add to my comfort or to the heavy debt of gratitude that I owe you. With each day that has passed, the likelihood of any attempt to find me here has diminished; and with each day, my sense of your noble kindness to a man of ruined fortunes has grown in greatness—until now I find no way of expressing the extent of my overwhelming obligation to you. I ask myself daily: How many women in the whole world would do this magnificent thing for a hunted exile, a stranger, a man who has no future of power ahead of him and who can never repay his enormous indebtedness?"

"You think that the search for you may have ended?"

"I feel almost sure that it has. I feel so sure of it that yesterday I asked the excellent Pedro to mail for me a letter to my friends in Mexico City, telling them where I am and suggesting that they at once arrange some scheme for my escape from the country."

"Where will you go?"

"To Paris. I shall live there. A considerable portion of my modest fortune has been for some time reposing in a

safe-deposit box in one of the banks of that delightful and hospitable city."

Mrs. Morton smiled. "I had been wondering about that. I thought it improbable that a man who was as familiar with Mexican history as you are would have failed to provide for several possible contingencies."

"Quite true. I always knew that my projects, my great visions, might fail. They are ended now; and my friends will come for me before long. And since it is probable that they will come suddenly,—perhaps even in the middle of the night—and I shall have to go with them at an instant's notice, there may be no opportunity for me to pay you my farewell respects. Will you, therefore, permit me, most gracious Señora, to repeat to you now my sense of undying admiration and gratitude?"

He rose gravely and bent low as he kissed her hand. When he lifted his head she saw that there were tears in his eyes. She was aware that his avowal of emotion was completely sincere. And she was not unmoved herself.

"Oh, I was glad to help you. You interested me. Now tell me about yourself—your thoughts, your projects, the things you were aiming at before your downfall."

General Gonzales' face lighted up. His strong wilfulness flamed in his eyes; his powerful hands were clenched as he rested them on his knees and leaned forward toward her.

"Señora, I will tell you. I am not a man who rose from humble life as the great Porfirio Díaz did: my family had money and power. But what was that? Nothing! I aspired to personal greatness! Don Porfirio was my ideal of character—yet how imperfect in policy! I saw far beyond him. He did what was historically necessary in his day: I de-

termined to do what was historically necessary in my day." He paused.

"Díaz was a man of terrific force," Mrs. Morton agreed. "But a Tory of the Tories."

"He was more than that: he was an absolute emperor, who ruled with a rod of iron. That is what I admire in him ——his assumption of that dictatorial power which was the sole force that could have moulded Mexico into a nation. He made it a nation and brought in foreign capital to develop it, and laid the foundation for Mexico's emergence from the Middle Ages."

"But the time for the sort of system he established is past now, isn't it?"

"Decidedly yes. We must change everything. Don Porfirio would have been shocked by the extent to which I uphold the rights of the common man. The aristocracies of the past have no place in our modern world. Undreamed-of forces have now been put into our hands: we must control them masterfully, not as mere inheritors. It was my intention to expropriate foreign capital, and break up and destroy utterly all the vast estates——so that your Chango and your Pedro might each one possess his own little portion of the earth's surface. Beneath the earth's surface, all the oil and mineral wealth would be the sole property of the state. Thus, with all men free and the state fabulously rich, we would release a tremendous power which can be guided toward incalculable heights. Do you see, Señora?"

Certain suspicions as to the ultimate goal of his plans were beginning to stir in her mind; but she contented herself with partially agreeing. "Yes, I see. It is a humane ideal. I myself have never believed that it was just or necessary

that a few individuals should own vast hereditary riches. Even when I was a girl and was far from rich, it pained me to realize that I had so very many more comforts than the poorer people around me."

"Señora, the nobility of your character would naturally produce exactly such ideas in you. In your hands, an ancient inheritance would blossom like a garden of flowers for the enrichment of mankind. But few people are like that: ah, you do not know the world! I know the world! And I was prepared to go to any lengths—even the most terrible slaughter that Mexico has seen since the days of the Conquest—to wrest by force the control of the great estates and the natural resources from the evil hands that now hold them. After the necessary carnage—after that bloodshed—I would seize the oil-wells and the mines for the state, and redistribute the agricultural land to all men alike, according to a new arrangement—to be worked under an intelligent central system of control and direction."

"You yourself, naturally, would direct the administration of this plan?"

"Certainly. We would call elections, of course: but at the start, any attempts to unseat the new government would have to be repressed rather firmly. The peasant is not yet experienced enough to be left to his own devices. He requires paternal supervision—for his own good."

She shuddered slightly at the phrase "for his own good": never in her life had she heard it used except in hypocrisy or self-deception. But she merely asked:

"But suppose he doesn't see that it is for his own good?"

"Ah, I have foreseen that possibility. The army must be greatly increased: it must be built up until it is the most

powerful force on the American continent—fully able to cope with rebellion within our borders or attack from without. It must be an instrument of steel, forged to fit the hand of its commander. I plan no aggression—but woe unto the power that attacks me from within or from without!"

"Oh dear!" she said. "So we come back to the old pattern of the past! When you first began to talk, I fancied that you believed in something new—some form of internationalism or socialism or communism."

"Communism! That absurd illusion! I trust, Señora, that you have no faith in that nonsense?"

"I don't know. You see, General Gonzales, I was brought up in the most conservative atmosphere imaginable, where the Church, the State, and Property were regarded as a Sacred Trinity. They were like three great stone idols, with men crawling insignificantly around their feet. Now I have lost my belief in all three of those gods: and I don't trust their supporters, either,—the priests and politicians and business men and soldiers who serve them. It seems to me that the great problem of the future is to find a way of returning to the people as a whole the ownership of all those things which a few bright men have stolen from them and turned into hereditary privilege. Whether communism can do that, I don't know. But the hope it expresses is one that touches my heart very deeply."

"You surprise me, Señora! Indeed, you shock me! What pattern of heroic greatness could ever emerge from a communistic state where all men are equal and there are no rewards for preeminence? Where is the incentive to magnificent action? Where the flame of glory? Where the lightning-flash of genius triumphant?"

His poetical eloquence had an unfortunate effect on her; it merely made her the more prosaic-minded and practical. She said:

"General, I'm going to speak frankly to you. I think you are a very able man, and I don't question the sincerity of your ideals. But on the other hand, I don't think you are an angel; and I don't believe that anybody except an angel could emerge honorably from the strain of exercising the powers that you were planning to give yourself. My Clara might—but nobody else. I'm an absolute pessimist about such things: I not only think, but I *know*, that dictatorial power destroys the integrity if not the sanity of the person who holds it. That vast political machine which you were planning to build up and control would soon forget the poor peasant and think only of itself."

The General frowned. "Perhaps I do not make myself clear. As I have said, I am not a communist or a socialist: those silly illusions do not deceive me. No: I am one who believes in what I would call 'Social Architecture'—a society in which the whole mass of free men accepts implicitly the guidance of its intellectual superiors."

She laughed. "In a word—you are a born dictator, a regular Napoleon!"

He seemed to take this accusation seriously, and to like it; he smiled faintly. "But unlike him, my first act as dictator would be to destroy, root and branch, every trace of the Catholic Church in Mexico. It is, and always has been, a cancer stifling all wholesome growth."

"Would that be wholly wise?" she asked. "I myself am not a believer; but if Chango hadn't his Catholic Church,

wouldn't he spend all his spare time in the *cantina,* not merely half of it as he does now?"

(9)

Thus they talked on, under the ancient mango-tree beside the placid lake—he with intent frowning brows, she with her usual skeptical good-humor. He grew more serious as she grew less so: as her faith in his phantasmagorial projects obviously diminished, he expanded his oratory. She could almost see his own vision of himself—the imaginary medals shining on his breast—the gold embroidery of his magnificent uniform—the pomp of parades and banners as he stood in the reviewing stand and took the salutes . . .

At last her silence became complete.

General Gonzales shook himself out of the intent concentration of his inner dream and looked at his silent companion. Then he smiled.

"I see, Señora, that you have not too high an opinion of the integrity or the intelligence of us *politicos!* From my experience, I cannot say I blame you."

"No, I have not too high an opinion: I think you are all very human—particularly you yourself. If you weren't, I'm afraid I wouldn't like you as well as I do. But if, as I choose to imagine, all *politicos* are robber-barons and safe-breakers in disguise, then I think you would make a very agreeable bandit—very courteous to ladies who fell into your hands—and that when rich traders or prelates were so unfortunate as to stray into your domain, you would know how to make intelligent disposition of the spoils that you took from them!"

With this Parthian shot she rose to leave him. He rose also and looked at her, half-angry and half-amused. She nodded to him with mock severity of reproof and started back toward the house.

When she had gone a few steps up the path she heard him chuckle aloud as if a very funny thought that suddenly struck him. "Yes! I will do that! I will do just that!" he exclaimed to himself. She paused and looked back. He was grinning broadly.

"Yes, Señora, you are right. I would indeed know very well how to make intelligent disposition of the spoils! I will prove it to you soon. You will understand what I mean at a time shortly after I have gone away from here. And at that time—you will know the time well when it comes!—at that time you too will have a small moral problem to face! I hope that your instincts are less honest than your theories: I hope that you are a little inconsistent; I hope that you are a slightly wicked woman! Yes, there will come an hour when you will remember very clearly that on this day, at this moment in your garden, I was wondering whether you were the possessor of my own particular kind of unorthodox and shameless intelligence,—and that I hoped to heaven you were!"

Suddenly he stopped his sardonic smiling. His voice became grave and earnest, and his eyes looked somberly into hers.

"Most noble Señora, God be with you forever! And do not think too badly of me!"

She smiled gently, and started up the path again.

She understood nothing of his allusions to the mysterious "moral problem" that awaited her after his departure. She

smiled a little over the inconsistency of his last pious words, "God be with you!" Coming as they did from this notable hater of religion, the unconscious comedy pleased her. After all, this was a rather amusing episode even if it was not romantic.

She paused for breath and gave a casual glance back toward the marble bench under the mango tree. Instantly she turned away, startled by what she saw. It was quite clear to her that General Gonzales had covered his face with his hands and that he was weeping.

She wanted to go back, and hold his head on her breast, and tell him that he was a dear, sweet, ignorant boy, and that the world always hurt everybody, and that he must not grieve too much over other people's sins or over his own . . .

It was impossible . . . She walked on, thumping the path impatiently with her stick.

(10)

On the following day, romance began in bitter earnest. She realized it immediately as she heard the unmistakable clatter of a file of heavy-footed soldiers marching up the cobbled street outside her garden-wall. When they reached her gate she heard the sharp order of an officer's voice: "Halt! Left face! Rest arms!" The rifle-butts rattled down onto the cobblestones. There was a loud knock on the gate, and the sound of Pedro's hurrying footsteps. She heard the squeaking of the gate on its hinges. That cursed gate! Why could she never remember to tell Chango to oil it?

She did not rise from where she sat in the living-room. The volume of Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* which she was reading lay idle in her lap. She took off her glasses and looked around her idly. There was nothing to do. Absolutely nothing.

In a moment Pedro, pale and serious, came in to her from the hall.

"Señora, there is a lieutenant at the gate, with a squad of soldiers. He asks the Señora's permission to bring his men into the patio; and then he wishes to speak with the Señora."

"Very good. Tell him he may. And then I will see him here in the living-room."

She waited patiently. She heard the faint sound of the waves at the edge of the lake and the dry rustling of the palm-leaves in the garden. There was nothing that she could do, she repeated to herself monotonously; absolutely nothing. She had foreseen all along that she would be helpless if this moment came.

She heard again the squeaking of the gate-hinges and the shuffling of the soldiers' feet as they entered to the pavement of the patio. Then came the brisk orders of the officer and the rattle of rifle-butts as they thudded to rest on the stone flagging. She took a deep breath, and put on her spectacles. They were reading-glasses; she could see nothing clearly at long range when she had them on; but she knew that they made her look stupider and more severe than her real self.

After a moment Pedro escorted the lieutenant into the room. He was a sophisticated-looking young man, obviously not long out of the *Escuela Militar de Aspirantes*. He

seemed very trim in his immaculate new uniform; he bowed courteously.

"The Señora will pardon—but it is my duty to request the honor of a few moments of her attention. There is at large a dangerous fugitive from justice—a very famous one, none other than the revolutionary conspirator His Excellency General Hernando Gonzales, late Secretary of War for the Federal Government of Mexico."

"Well, Señor?" She took off her spectacles and saw that he was a pleasant-enough looking boy.

"I have received orders to search all the villages and the private residences around the lake, to ascertain if he may be somewhere in this neighborhood."

"It is a large task, Señor."

"Very large indeed, Señora! It will take me weeks. Naturally, I am fully aware that the fugitive whom we seek would not be here in your villa; still, I must perform a search. It would create an unfortunate impression of favoritism if I omitted any one house. And so, absurd as both you and I know such a step to be, I am obliged to examine the premises just as if the Villa Colima were actually under suspicion!"

"I quite understand, Señor. You represent the government, not yourself; you are an officer performing a military duty; and you cannot permit yourself all those small courtesies and favors that would be natural to you in private life."

"Ah, how well you express it, Señora!"

"The villa is entirely at your disposal. But need you bring your men into my house? Can they not remain in

the courtyard? They are—at least most soldiers are—so dirty."

The young man laughed and glanced down at his own immaculately shining boots. "Alas, Señora, it is only too true, what you say! But we shall change all that under the new régime. We of the new régime have lofty ideals as to the proper pride that a soldier should take in his appearance. We will teach these yokels! Incredible as it may seem, some of them complain because they have to wear shoes: they have never worn shoes before, and they say that they hurt their feet!"

"I can well believe it, Señor. And now—will you begin your search downstairs? Proceed as you like."

"Thank you, gracious Señora."

He glanced casually about the living-room. Mrs. Morton was glad that her common sense had told her not to admit General Gonzales to the house. She need have no fear that there would be telltale cigar ashes in the fireplace or a man's handkerchief dropped under a table.

After a moment, the lieutenant signified that he was satisfied.

He followed as she led him into the dining-room, the kitchen and the outhouses. He found nothing that interested him. The General's hut, Mrs. Morton noted, was somewhat more orderly than it would have been if Chango were occupying it; but it contained nothing that could awaken suspicion.

The lieutenant was a courteous young fellow. By this time she rather liked him in spite of his naïveté and his ominous mission. She was sure that if he eventually took

her off to jail he would do so regretfully and would treat her with consideration.

She led him upstairs. There his inspection was of the most perfunctory sort. He almost closed his eyes as he glanced around these intimate quarters; and when in her own bedroom she started to open the closet door, he held up his hand in horror.

"I beg you, Señora! It is not necessary that I inspect your private cabinet," he said gallantly.

"Well, there's nobody hiding there," she said, flinging the door wide open and disclosing a row of her old neat dresses in orderly array on their hangers. She realized with shame how old they were: the newest at least five years old, the oldest was perhaps almost as old as this young man himself. "Goodness gracious," she thought, "I must write Nora to order me a new dress, if the whole of the Mexican Army is going to come here to inspect my wardrobe!" She forgot the young man as she thought of Nora, that stalwart reckless delightful married daughter of hers in Mexico City. How Nora would laugh if she could see her venerable mother in this plight! She who had always scolded Nora for getting herself into complicated situations!

She was still thinking of Nora as she preceded the lieutenant down the stairs. He recalled her thoughts to the present by saying confidentially: "You must understand, Señora, that though I am a newcomer in Chapala, I am aware, as everybody is, that you were a friend of President Porfirio Díaz. The great Don Porfirio! I am a great admirer of Don Porfirio."

She froze a little at hearing this infant use the personal name of her old friend the terrible Díaz. Ah, Don Porfirio

—he who had for almost fifty years held this nation in the hollow of his hand, and done wonders for it, and set in motion incalculable evils for it . . . She was glad that it was not Don Porfirio of the black burning eyes who was now searching her house for a political enemy. Don Porfirio made no mistakes when he was pursuing his enemies, and he was ruthless when he found them . . .

When she and the lieutenant reached the foot of the stairs she paused for a moment. Her heart was beating violently. The search of the house had been mere nonsense, mere play-acting on her part: but she was nevertheless aware that this was in fact no play; it was a man-hunt with life and death at stake. She was aware that when she led the young officer out onto the terrace, General Gonzales himself might be standing in the garden bareheaded ten feet away, with the full glare of the revealing light on his proud face. She had had no chance to warn him. She could not warn him now. The situation was hopeless. Now he would pay the price of his rash confidence in supposing that the hunt for him was ended.

She did not believe in the efficacy of prayer, and she had not prayed seriously since the days of her girlhood in England. But now as she crossed the hall an unconscious petition formed itself on her lips:

"Oh Lord, give us luck! Give us one of those damn miracles!" she whispered to herself.

She and the lieutenant emerged onto the terrace and stood looking down onto the garden paths, the flower beds, and the lake.

"A beautiful garden!" the officer said. "A garden worthy of a palace!"

"Hardly that—but I am very glad you like it." She glanced down casually.

She saw at once that the worst of her fears had not come true; but what she did see was bad enough. Bad enough indeed!

There, not a hundred feet away, in plain sight, was General Gonzales. He wore his usual ragged clothes and his old straw hat. His hands were smeared with an unaccustomed covering of dirt. His hat was pulled down over his face and he was on his hands and knees, as if completely absorbed in the task of weeding.

Mrs. Morton at once guessed that he must have heard the noise of the arrival of the soldiers, and that he had judged that his only chance for safety lay in absurd unconcealment. Probably he had read the Poe detective story in which searchers pry into every nook and cranny of an apartment, hunting in vain for a dangerous letter—a letter which the clever owner has left lying in plain sight on the mantel.

The lieutenant paused and cast his eyes carefully over the garden. There were no thickets, no masses of shrubbery within which a fugitive could be hiding. All was open to view from where he stood.

He looked for a moment at the kneeling man. The man was weeding with ostentatious vigor, as if aware that his mistress' eyes were on him just now. He dug green things up rapidly out of the garden-bed and threw the results of his efforts out onto the garden-path. His industry was admirable.

But Mrs. Morton's heart almost stood still as she suddenly became aware of just what Antonio was doing. The green

things which he was weeding up and throwing away were not weeds; as anyone could see with half an eye, they were a row of choice geranium-slips which Chango had laboriously transplanted yesterday. The telltale dampness of the spray from the watering-pot was clearly visible around each stem.

This, she felt, was the end. If the lieutenant knew anything about gardens, ruin had come. Surely if he stood watching for only a moment or two longer he would perceive that this gardener had got his training in a very odd school indeed.

Then, as if in answer to Mrs. Morton's ironic prayer, there actually happened the miracle for which she had prayed.

Chango came striding down the garden-path, carrying two buckets. He saw Antonio, stopped, and stood transfixed as he became aware of the nature of the activities of his helper. He paused with open mouth.

Then the buckets fell from his hands. With an animal cry of agony and disgust, he leaped forward swiftly and administered a mighty kick to the rear of the crouching Antonio. Antonio fell forward onto his face, growling and muttering in protest. Chango stood over him, howling maledictions.

The lieutenant smiled at Mrs. Morton and turned away.

"Thank you, Señora, for your courtesy. I see that there is nobody here."

(11)

They reentered the house. With elaborate apologies for his intrusion, the officer signified that he would now take

his departure. Mrs. Morton, smiling graciously, accompanied him to the front door and wished him good fortune in his search for the fugitive and in all the further steps of his military career.

He saluted with fine punctilio, barked the orders to his men, and the invading army marched out from the courtyard and their heavy tread grew gradually fainter along the cobbled street.

Clara and Pedro were standing in the patio near the kitchen door, intently watching all that happened. Now Pedro hurried across the flagstones and closed and barred the gate. Mrs. Morton heard the squeak of the gate on its rusty hinges. "I must remember to tell Chango to oil that gate! Can't I ever think of that?"

And suddenly she felt very tired, and put out her hand as if to hold on to something. Instantly Clara was at her side, anxiously looking at her. "You will go to bed now, Señora, and rest—will you not?"

Mrs. Morton glared at her. "Go to bed? Go to bed? What do you take me to be, Clara? A feeble old woman?" Then her expression changed. She took Clara's arm. "Thank you, Clara my dear. Perhaps I am a little tired. Battlefields are a bit hard on the noncombatants into whose private gardens they intrude! I will do as you say: I will go to bed and stay there until tomorrow. Then I shall be all right again."

"Ah, how wise, Señora! I will bring dinner up to your room at the usual hour. And perhaps a little caviare with your dinner?" Clara said wheedlingly.

"No, bring a lot! Give me the whole of one of those small tins of caviare and not a bit to that wretched An-

tonio, who has done his best in more ways than one to ruin my garden!"

Clara smiled. Pedro's face remained frozen.

(12)

In the morning, General Gonzales was gone.

All that Mrs. Morton knew of his departure was conveyed to her by Pedro. After he had served her usual breakfast in the dining-room, he followed her out onto the terrace and lingered silent, obviously bursting with important news. She sat down and looked up at him.

"Well, what is it, Pedro?"

"Señora, your gardener is no longer here!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Señora, it is true! In the middle of the night, he came and waked me up. There was a strange man with him, a man I never saw before, a big fierce man. He looked like this—" Pedro thrust out his chest and his chin, stiffened his spine, and stared blankly at nothing—producing a remarkable imitation of a huge haughty general. It was so like the pictures Mrs. Morton had seen of the late General Allenby in the illustrated London papers that she was obliged to laugh. Pedro was disconcerted.

"Go on, Pedro. I was not laughing at you: I was thinking of something quite different. What happened then?"

"Then the gardener said that this man had offered him higher wages than you paid, and that to get the job he had to go with him at once. I did not believe a word he said—but what was I to do? He said you would understand how important it was for him not to lose a chance of better

employment, and to thank you respectfully for your kindness to him. And he asked me particularly to remember to give you this as a souvenir; he said it was his favorite flower." Pedro handed to Mrs. Morton a bit of damaged geranium.

"Very good," Mrs. Morton said, taking the flower. She was not amused by General Gonzales' joke, but she concealed her annoyance. "I do not blame the man in the least for going if he could better himself."

"And the man who came for him had an enormous motorcar. It was covered with dust; I think it had come all the way from Mexico City. And there were three other men in the car—and they all laughed a great deal when they saw how Antonio was dressed. And I think—I myself think, Señora—that those four men who had come for him were all *generales*—all four of them! And there was no chauffeur—why was there no chauffeur?—and one of the *generales* was at the wheel—and did he drive fast! And he was a little man, very dark, and he scowled all the time."

"Really!"

"And then," Pedro went on, with a combination of awe and complacency in his voice, "something happened that made me know for certain that Antonio was not what he pretended to be—for what do you suppose he did at last?"

"I cannot guess."

"He made me go down to Chango's hut and awaken him; and when we both stood before him, he said: 'I wish that I could be as good a gardener as you are, Chango, and as faithful a servant as you are, Pedro.' And he put into Chango's hands one hundred silver pesos, and into my hands one hundred silver pesos. One hundred pesos! One

hundred pesos! And then he saluted us—just like this!" Pedro stood rigid as a ramrod and swept his hand to his brow in a splendid military salute.

"Well, well!" At first she was very much alarmed by the thought of this spectacular departure. The two servants would never forget the experience—and how they would talk! Then she realized that General Gonzales' judgment had been more accurate than her own hasty fear. He had done just the right thing. He had stunned Pedro and Chango into silence. By his grandeur and by the theatrical munificence of his gift, he had bound these two men to him for life: now they knew him to be a great and generous *magnifico* in disguise—and both gratitude for his bounty and fear of his secret power would prevent them from breathing a word about him to anyone.

"And what will you do with your money, Pedro?" she asked. "One hundred pesos is a large sum."

"I have already spent it. I went early this morning to the man who owns my house, and I told him that I would not stay there any more if he did not fix the roof and the north wall where all the adobe bricks are washed away by the rains for a space ten feet wide—and we talked—and when I had him frightened by the big cost of the repairs, he offered to sell the house to me very cheap instead of paying out so much money—and finally I bought the house for ninety-four pesos. And now I shall not have to pay rent any more. And the other six pesos I gave to my wife."

"Excellent! That is just what I would have suggested." She pictured in her imagination the little adobe hut where Pedro and his dull peasant wife and his three-year-old boy

lived. It was a short distance down the road, away from the lake and hidden behind a fence of huge cactus stalks. Though it was only a hovel built of mud and thatched with reeds, with an earthen floor, she knew that Pedro was proud of it. There was a small plot of land behind it where Pedro's wife had a bean-patch and a few chickens and a pig; and Mrs. Morton was glad that it was now wholly his, as a minimum of security in future days when she herself would be here no longer.

"Excellent!" she repeated. "You are a clever, good boy, Pedro, and a man of fine quality. I do not know what I would do without you. I am very fond of you. Do you know that? Do you know that?"

Pedro blushed deeply and tears came into his eyes. "Many years have I served the Señora—and not one night have I forgotten to pray to the Blessed Virgin for her welfare."

Mrs. Morton suddenly roused herself from her musings on Pedro's perfections.

"Did you say that Chango, also, received one hundred pesos last night?"

"Yes, Señora."

"My goodness gracious! That's a public calamity! Go, —go at once, and bring him to me."

"Yes, Señora, I will fetch him." And as an afterthought, Pedro added: "And the *magnifico* left one hundred pesos for Clara, too."

"That does not matter: Clara has brains in her head! But hurry! Get hold of Chango before he has a chance to go outside the gate—or nobody can tell what may happen!"

She sat there on the terrace waiting anxiously until Pedro

returned. She sighed with relief to see that he was leading a sheepish and idiotically smiling Chango. The worthy gardener stood before his mistress, fingering his straw hat and fiddling one bare dirty foot against the other.

"Well, Chango, I hear that you have received a wonderful present."

"Yes, Señora. Wonderful present! Wonderful present!"

"Let me see it."

Chango delved with his dirty paws into four different pockets, from each of which he produced handfuls of heavy silver dollars. He tumbled them onto the table before Mrs. Morton. She stacked them neatly into even piles of ten pesos each—a handsome row of ten piles of shining silver coins. Chango's eyes glistened. So far as he knew, this was the largest single hoard of money that had ever existed in the history of the world.

"Yes, just one hundred pesos: that is correct. I see you have not spent any of it yet. You are very lucky to have this, Chango. And what are you going to do with it?"

"I thought I would give it to the priest, to say Masses for the soul of my dear mother."

Chango, in making this extraordinary statement, did not believe it and did not expect Mrs. Morton to believe it. It was pure fantasy, a harmless and graceful gesture, intended to deceive no one. It was like artificial flowers put on a grave: everyone knows they are not real: no fraud was designed. He spoke thus merely because it seemed to him to sound rather pious and noble. Mrs. Morton felt much as she felt in reading some poets—that the author believed that if what one says is sufficiently eloquent and decorative, its truth is no matter.

"I knew your good mother, Chango," Mrs. Morton responded coldly, fixing him with her eye. "She was an excellent woman, who did her best in this world; and I am sure that she is now safely in heaven under the direct care of the Blessed Virgin, and that her soul requires no such lavish payments to the Church as those you mentioned."

She took two silver pesos from the nearest pile and held them out to him.

"Now, here is one peso; that one you may give to the priest as a thank-offering for your good luck in receiving this present. And here is another peso, on which you may get drunk. The remaining ninety-eight pesos—" she swept them to the edge of the table and into her capacious black bag—"the remaining ninety-eight pesos I shall send to your guardian to keep for you. And every Saturday I shall give you one of them to get drunk on. At that rate, they will last you almost two years."

Chango gasped in astonishment at his decisive mistress and her wonderful powers of calculating these vast figures in her head. He knew better than to question the law as she laid it down. All these years he had never disputed her when she paid him his weekly money and then took most of it away from him and sent it to a great *magnifico* somewhere—his name was Don Enrique Castellano—whom the Señora had had appointed as his legal guardian.

Though he half regretted to see the big silver pesos disappear into the black bag, yet at heart he was relieved. Now there was one perilous possibility that had been withdrawn from his life. A certain ambitious dream that had come to him this morning could no longer lure him on to its tremendous heights.

He had been looking forward with fascinated dread to the prospect of his great one-hundred peso drunk. Incredible glories opened before him—such peaks of splendor as no preceding man had ever envisaged. Why, this sublime adventure would take him weeks, would lead him anywhere, might even be the death of him. He had foreseen the awfulness of parts of it—his sick dizzy hours, his days and nights in the smoky little *cantina*, the fights that would inevitably occur, the knocked-out teeth and slashed scalp —and his mornings in the gutter again, with aching head and sand-papered throat. The whole procedure might take him so long that the kind Señora would grow impatient of his return, and would employ somebody else in his place. That would be a terrible thing, for he knew from experience that most masters were cruel and exacting, and made you work your fingers to the bone, and did not send any money to your guardian Don Enrique. Yes, that would be a high price to pay even for the grandeur of a heroic adventure.

Now, instead of those perils and the splendors and agonies of the unimaginable one-hundred-peso drunk, he saw stretching in infinite vista ahead of him the security, the mild recurrent beneficence, of two whole years of weekly debauches. This was bliss indeed. He smiled his foolish innocent smile at Mrs. Morton.

"You are satisfied with what I say?"

"Yes, Señora. Yes, Señora."

"Very good. You are a sensible fellow. And now, Chango—now at last you may really move into your 'domicile.' I am sorry that I had to disappoint you and keep

you out of it for so long—but I had no other place to put Antonio."

Chango's response to this pleasant news was automatic. "Antonio very good gardener. Very good gardener." Mrs. Morton wondered whether this was another piece of consciously polite invention which he did not expect her to believe—or whether in his pathetically confused mind the picture of Antonio the generous *magnifico* had displaced the picture of Antonio the worthless horticulturalist—creating a pleasing image in which Chango now believed himself.

When Chango had gone, Pedro lingered gravely. Evidently he had been reflecting on the recent events.

"May I ask the Señora a question? May I ask—was that man the famous *veterano,* General Hernando Gonzales?"

"Yes."

"I wish I had known! I would have kissed his hands! People say that he is the savior of the poor—greater than Díaz!"

"He is a very remarkable man, Pedro: whether he really loves the poor, I do not know. But I know that he hates the Church, and will destroy it if ever he can. I know that to be a fact; he told me so himself. He believes that the Church prevents the true growth of the Mexican people."

Pedro's face fell. He went away, perplexed and mournful.

(13)

Ten days later she was surprised one afternoon to receive another call from the vice-consul. He did not usually time

his visits to Chapala so close together. But she learned at once the reason:—he had come to say good-by to her.

"Yes, it will be some time before I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mrs. Morton. My long-expected leave-of-absence has come; and I am off to England next week."

"Oh, how delightful for you! I shall miss you. You will stay in England all the time?"

"Yes—either in London and see a bit of people again —or with my family in Devonshire. I wish you were coming, too! We'd have a jolly time on shipboard."

"That would indeed be pleasant—but I do not think I shall go to England again. You must remember that it is forty years since I have set foot on British soil—and so many things are gone or changed that I fear England itself would now seem to me a little too much like Shakespeare's 'bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.' No, I should not care to go back."

"No, why should you?—when you are so happy and comfortable here," he agreed. "And if you went even for a short time, what would the lovely villa do without its gracious chatelaine?"

"I told you not to adopt those Spanish manners! I hope your visit to England will knock them out of you for good and all!"

"But you admire them in Don Enrique?" he asked a little slyly.

She replied with a touch of asperity: "May I perhaps call your attention to the fact that you and Señor Castellano differ in several particulars of blood, birth, education and temperament—and that the special virtues inherent in

each of you are not necessarily interchangeable to advantage?"

He laughed. "I accept your rebuke: it is well deserved. And oh, by the way!" he went on. "I left in the hall something which I brought for you from Mexico City. I do not know what it is: it is a sealed package that was delivered at the consulate by a messenger who asked for a receipt but declined to say who had sent the package. Naturally we refused to sign the receipt—but the messenger left the package and went away. We know nothing of it except that it is addressed to you." He went out to the hall and returned with a foot-long parcel. "Hope it isn't a bomb, is it?"

"I don't think it's anything as exciting as that," she said, "but many thanks to you anyway for bringing it." She guessed at once that it was some small courteous token of appreciation from General Gonzales—a lace mantilla, perhaps, or an embroidered fan.

She broke the seals and removed the cover of the wooden box which she found inside the paper wrappings.

There lay a plush case twelve inches long and six wide. It was obviously very old, for the original purple fabric had faded to a pale lilac. Mrs. Morton took it out of the wooden box, touched a spring, and opened the case. A jeweled cross of heavy silver reposed there.

She lifted it from its white satin nest. The back of the cross was an elaborate formal pattern of chased metal; its front was made up of eleven enormous square-cut amethysts of deep hue, set close together so that seven of them constituted the upright element of the design, with two on each side to form the horizontal bar. Its massiveness of pat-

tern was unmistakably of the finest period of old Spanish craftsmanship—a collector's piece of the first order.

In the plush case was also a plain black ebony pedestal. She placed the pedestal on the mantelpiece and set the cross in the socket designed to receive and hold it upright.

The great amethyst relic stood there magnificent and overwhelming. All surrounding objects seemed dwarfed into insignificance by its presence. The mild light from the terrace was caught, imprisoned, and sent back transfigured out of the depths of the tremendous jewels—soft, purple, richly impressive—as in a great cathedral the common air is transformed by the power of the deep-toned organ and emerges as solemn music.

The vice-consul stared at it in stony silence.

"Isn't it superb!" Mrs. Morton said, looking at it fascinated. "Did you ever see anything more beautiful?" He did not answer.

She peered again into the plush case and found the card she was looking for. It was a plain card on which was written in a vigorous Spanish hand: "*To a great and generous lady, with undying gratitude and admiration, in memory of her unworthy gardener, Antonio.*"

She laughed and handed the card to the vice-consul. "I'll wager anything you like that you can't guess what that means!"

He read the inscription and his face grew grave. "So the crazy rumors I have been hearing are true! The story of your gardener is being told at every dinner-table in Mexico City. Your name is not connected with it—but everybody is laughing at the government because of a tale that they

let Gonzales, disguised as some lady's gardener, slip through their fingers."

"He did escape, then?"

"The newspapers say that he managed to get to Veracruz and is now on shipboard, halfway across to France. I think that nobody was very sorry that he got away—for after all the revolutionary plotting he had done, they would have had to shoot him if they had caught him—and that would have been rather too bad. He was a bully—but everybody liked him."

"Good! General Gonzales was no worse than any of that lot of politicians and generals and professional thieves. Indeed, I think he was a good deal better," she said defiantly.

"It may be as you say. My official position does not permit me to express an opinion upon such delicate matters." He paused a moment and then went on hesitantly. "Do you mind not telling people exactly how you got this amethyst cross—through what agency it came into your hands? I mean, I would be put in a very embarrassing situation if it became generally known that it was I who brought it to you. International complications might be stirred up: the consulate might be involved. Indeed, it would be a very bad matter; it would probably ruin my career."

"Why do you say that? Why can't General Gonzales give me a present if he likes and if I choose to accept it?" Mrs. Morton again looked at the amethyst cross. It was a magnificently beautiful thing, glowing with a richness of soft ancient lights. She loved it. She had never seen any material object for which she cared so deeply. Ordinary jewels, however fine and costly, had never attracted her: but this was a thing out of a different world.

"Well, you see," the vice-consul said, "General Gonzales was a man of exquisite taste and considerable knowledge of old Spanish art. Just before he was thrown out of office and was obliged to flee for his life, he had his soldiers close the National Museum for twenty-four hours—'for military inspection.' Imagine his nerve!—'for military inspection!' Professor Martinez, the Curator of the Museum, has been in a frenzy ever since; for certain objects have disappeared. Among them, one was a very remarkable silver-and-amethyst cross, an object of incalculable value, that was sent centuries ago by the King of Spain to the first Bishop of Mexico. It is famous throughout the world. Even I happen to have looked at it often in its case in the Museum. It was a beauty!"

"I see," said Mrs. Morton reflectively. "I see." Then she added: "No, don't worry; I won't involve you in this."

He said nothing.

She reflected again. "You think, do you, that I ought to send it back to the Government?"

"Obviously."

Mrs. Morton frowned. "I'm not so sure that it's quite as obvious as all that! I don't want in the least to give it back to that lot of politicians and thieves." Then she remembered General Gonzales' words in the garden, concerning the "moral problem" which she would some day have to face, and his hope that she was "the possessor of his own particular kind of unorthodox and shameless intelligence." And she could picture Gonzales on shipboard now, laughing at the thought of her ethical dilemma—which he had fully foreseen and had carefully plotted to bring about. What a devil he was! She remembered every detail of that

moment in the garden. And she was aware that she almost loved that queer man, with all his fantastic sense of comedy and tragedy and good and evil.

She stood perplexed. Must she really relinquish this princely gift, this grandiose souvenir of her brief romantic days? Who was the vice-consul that he should presume to act as her conscience?

Suddenly out of the corner of her eye she noticed that Clara was moving about quietly in the dining-room, arranging some flowers.

"Ah!" she said to the vice-consul. "I shall seek moral advice from one who knows more about true morals than you and I do! Clara!" she called, beckoning to her.

"Did you call me, Señora?" Clara came into the living-room.

"Clara, what do you think of that?"

Clara stared at the great amethyst cross. She stood motionless and speechless. Her melancholy eyes glowed with a joyous wonder. At last she said: "Oh, Señora, but it is beautiful! Where did you ever find such a treasure—a holy treasure?"

"I didn't find it. It was given to me."

"Oh, a wonderful gift!"

"It was given to me by a man who had stolen it."

"Stolen it!"

"Yes. Now, Clara, shall I keep it or shall I send it back to the place from which it was stolen?"

Clara paused in embarrassment. "It was stolen from the Church, Señora? But that is sacrilege!"

"No, Clara; it was stolen from the National Museum in Mexico City."

Clara meditated for a moment. "Oh, from the Government! . . ." Then her face cleared and she smiled. "In that case, a gracious lady like yourself can keep it without any peril to her soul. It is no more than when Cortés gave the gold of the Montezumas to the Queen of Spain. And besides—this cross is so holy and so beautiful that it can bring no harm."

"You are a wise woman, Clara, my dear. Thank you for your advice." She turned to the vice-consul.

"You heard what she said? Though I can't quite follow her logic, nevertheless I agree with her."

"That is for you to decide."

"It is, indeed. Doubtless you will regard me as an immoral old woman; and perhaps it is true that my recent association with generals has corrupted me a little. But I do not care. So long as I live, that amethyst cross will remain here."

"But, Mrs. Morton! . . ."

"Oh pish and tosh and a boiled owl! I am determined to be wicked and romantic, even if it does imperil my soul a little. In other words, I'm a lost woman—and there is very little that you can do about it."

"But do you think that you dare keep this cross? It is not like a trifling object stolen by a common thief!"

She grew angry. "And do you think I'd want to keep it if it were? You don't understand at all: it's because this is such a terrible thing to do that I want to do it." Then her irritation passed away, and she laughed. "You, my dear friend, are an English gentleman—and a very fine thing it is to be indeed. But I am Elizabeth Morton, a harmless old body and a curate's daughter: and no one is going

to search for the amethyst cross in the villa of so insignificant a person as I am. And tomorrow I am going to add a codicil to my will—and oh, how you will hate that codicil when you see it! But you can't stop me."

"I don't understand, Mrs. Morton."

"I have not a great many years to live: during those few years, I am going to keep the amethyst cross. And I am going to add to my will a provision by which, after my death, I openly and shamelessly bequeath it to the National Museum, 'In Memory of my beloved friend, General Hernando Gonzales.' "

"I cannot dissuade you?"

"Nobody can dissuade me." She stood, calm and triumphant.

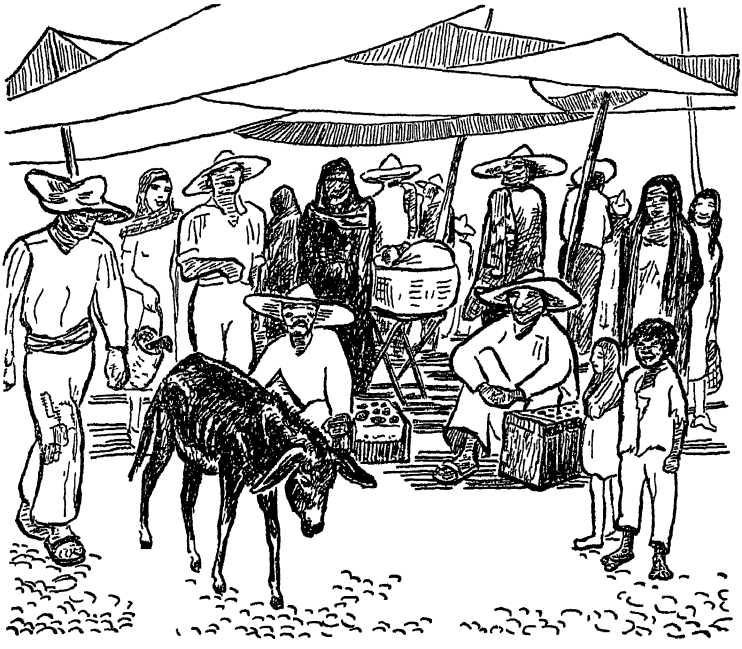
Yet one small twinge of uncertainty lingered in her heart, now that her decision had been made. What, what would Don Enrique say—and still more to be dreaded, what would he *think*—about this strange behavior of his old-time friend?

Ah yes, ah yes! How would Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, a poet and a gentleman, regard a romantic sentimentalist, a friend of flashy generals, and a receiver of stolen goods?

For a moment she reflected in dismayed apprehension. This might be a serious matter between him and her. Was she perhaps imperiling a unique friendship which had for so many years been one of the treasured elements in her life? She knew Don Enrique extremely well—as well as she had ever known anyone—and she regarded him with boundless admiration and affection: but she was not entirely sure as to one side of his nature. She did not know

whether his cool, gentle, kindly sense of humor was elastic enough to cover such a case as this. Perhaps he would regard it as a question of personal honor; perhaps when he learned of her misdeed his lips would straighten and his dark eyes harden into that rare but familiar expression of calm scorn which, if it were ever directed against herself, would be to her more terrible than volcanic explosions of wrath from someone else.

Was she perhaps going to have to pay too high a price for her absurd romance and her amethyst cross?



III

THE BURRO OF CHAPALA

MRS. MORTON'S FEARS as to how Señor Castellano might view her misdoings were needless. A week later she received a letter. He wrote that he had heard very amusing rumors that she had been entertaining persons of lofty station and receiving amazing gifts; but that if she still condescended to acknowledge acquaintance with ordinary humble people, and if there were no danger of his being arrested as a fellow-plotter, he would give himself the pleasure of calling on her some time during the following

week. She hardly admitted to herself how much this message relieved her mind.

Meanwhile, the spell of an old accustomed quietude returned to the Villa Colima, and life resumed its normal aspect. In the garden, Chango moved with his usual slow tireless footsteps up and down the paths, carrying up from the lake, in buckets suspended in age-old fashion from a pole that lay across his shoulders, the great draughts of water required by the thirsty trees and flower beds, and without which they would die. This was his incessant task during most of the year. With silent bare feet he plodded up and down the slope. Clara in her dim kitchen, amid her primitive charcoal-braziers and earthen pots out of the stone age, prepared her excellent food. And Pedro, alert and shrewd and bustling, performed his usual functions of houseboy with his wonted perfection. Mrs. Morton sighed with relief as she viewed this recovered tranquillity of her small domain. Once in a lifetime was often enough to have it invaded by great historic events.

When Castellano came, Mrs. Morton was in the garden; she told Pedro to bring the visitor there. He walked down the path, tall, composed, smiling his grave benignant smile; his trim pointed beard, his dark friendly eyes, his long, sensitive, firm hand, were reassurances to her of some beautiful sanity still existing somewhere in the world beyond the reach of reckless *generales* and venal *politicos*. She felt as if he were a courtly and wise ambassador from the realms of poetry and intuitive truth, come to rescue her from the grasp of phantasmagorial realties.

He greeted her with his usual affectionate formality, and laughed when she mentioned to him the slight feeling of

nightmarishness which recent events had left with her.

"We should not take such happenings too seriously," he said. She loved the low-toned clear quality of his voice. "We should learn to view all fortuitous events as a series of phantoms and legends, having only a symbolic significance."

They were crossing the terrace; his gaze wandered through the open French windows into the living-room and fell at once on the great amethyst cross as it stood supported by its ebony pedestal on the bookcase. He gave an exclamation, walked up to the cross, and stood looking at it for a long time in silence.

"It is indeed a wonderful object," he said at last, turning away. "I would have stolen it myself."

"I doubt that!" she said. "I think you might have kept it, once you had it—just as I did; but I do not think that either you or I would have had the arrogance necessary to do what was easy for General Gonzales to do."

"I fear you are right," he admitted, smiling and looking at her with his dark luminous eyes. "Sometimes I envy those men of action who move with the sudden impetus of natural forces and whose power to create events is never paralyzed by the deadening inertia of reflection. They act —and let the consequences take care of themselves. Poor wretches such as myself are so absorbed in our imagined picture of what may follow the act that we leave the real world unaltered by our passing. We are barren of deeds."

"I have heard you say that before," she said, "and I have never believed you. For you *do* act, in your own appropriate fashion. Do you pretend that a work of the imagination—the creation of a poem or a play or a history—is

not in itself a deed? Many a book has been an act of earthquake size."

"I grant you that," he said. "It is only that we writers never see the results of our work as the men of action do. Shall I ever know whether my play, *El Torbellino Fuerte*, was, except for your too generous approval, written in vain? It is because of that uncertainty that we are inclined to estimate the importance of our work very low."

"It is very foolish of you."

"It is merely that I accept without repining the fact that I am a man of reflection——not one who rides forth into the great world of events with arms and banners."

(2)

Castellano's words brought back to Mrs. Morton's mind the picture of his house in Guadalajara. She had seen it only once in all these years. The occasion had been long ago, when she was returning from one of her rare visits to her daughter Nora in Mexico City. The poet, aware of her impending arrival at Guadalajara on the overnight train from the Capital, had written inviting her to rest and take luncheon at his house before continuing her journey by motor to Chapala. He had added, with a characteristic discreetness and formality that amused her, that it would give his young niece, Señorita Maria-Josephina Castellano Cedillo, the greatest of pleasure to visit him for the day and to act as temporary hostess of his house.

Mrs. Morton accepted the invitation. On her arrival she was welcomed by the charming and shy young Señorita Cedillo with all the courtesy of a great lady of Spain. The

girl had the beautiful dark Castellano eyes. Mrs. Morton spent a somewhat bewildered two hours amid the faded splendors of the ancient house. Obviously it had been built in days when the Castellano fortunes were more blooming than they were today: the crumbling plaster and mouldering tapestries of the large spreading mansion had seen gayer figures than those of the quiet Don Enrique and the two elderly female servants who at present were its only habitants.

Young Señorita Maria-Josephina, after graciously and shyly presiding at luncheon and playing the dignified hostess to Mrs. Morton, slipped quietly away when they rose from the table; and it was Señor Castellano alone who accompanied his guest through the old halls. There were many formal rooms in which stood gilded furniture that must have been brought over in the days of the Emperor Maximilian; and in the long corridors hung portraits out of still earlier times—portraits of men whose pointed black beards, firm lips and dark eyes seemed like echo after echo of Castellano himself, receding into the centuries of the past.

What impressed Mrs. Morton most strongly, and what she remembered most vividly now after so many years, was the poet's study. It was a vast room, paneled with books from floor to ceiling. Four low wide windows with leaded panes looked out onto the flower-decked patio; in the center of each window was a circle on which gleamed the colors of a heraldic crest. The light in the room was subdued but not gloomy. The place seemed like the retreat of some highborn abbot of a medieval monastery—a refuge

withdrawn from the noise and contention of the barbaric outside world.

The floor, an ancient marquetry of ebony and mahogany, was burnished to the brilliance of a dark bronze bowl and slightly dented here and there by some unwontedly forceful movement of time and man across its surface. It was the only marquetry floor she had ever seen that was to her taste; she detested those in which the various inlaid woods were in sharply contrasting patterns like a chessboard: on this floor the difference between the black ebony and the time-darkened mahogany was so slight as to be merely a pleasing variation of one mellow tone.

The beams of the ceiling carried out the same relation; hand-hewn rafters had been subdued by time and by the smoke of ancient torches until their long shafts and huge curling corbels seemed less like architectural creations than magically petrified outcroppings and convolutions of mysterious night itself. There was something dreamlike about the whole room. The faded gold of old Spanish bindings spread a glow along the expanses of bookshelves; and the monastic chairs and tables, enriched by covers and cushions of tapestry, invited one to no hasty perusal of the morning newspaper, but rather to the slow pondering of some leather-bound folio-volume of Plato or Lucretius or Calderon. It was a retreat from the importunity of the modern day and the world of deeds.

But she had noted that in two of the corners of the room stood two strangely contrasting symbols of the world of action. One was a dim suit of ancient armor—tall and slender, made for some man of the Castellano blood. The

other was Don Enrique's gleaming typewriter—a portable machine of the latest model.

Today, here in her living-room, with Castellano near her, her thoughts went back to that monastic retreat of his. She wondered whether his ancestors had worn their armor with delight as they sallied forth to combat, or whether it was with reluctance that they had emerged from the seclusion of their books. And she wondered still more whether Castellano's shining typewriter was the symbol of joyful and impassioned forays into the modern world, or whether it was only the sign of his knightly acquiescence to a sense of duty.

She answered him: "No, you would not be happy in a world of arms and banners, would you?"

"No," he said gravely. "For better or for worse, I do not happen to be that kind of person. And I have long since reconciled myself to my defects. I am not, Señora, you understand, a recluse: I enjoy going out into the world and encountering all kinds and conditions of people. But for my real work, I prefer the quietude of that study of mine which you saw at Guadalajara."

"I can understand that," she said. "I have much that feeling about my garden."

"Doubtless," he agreed. "But not all people have the same feeling about gardens that you have. You and I both know many people to whom the possession of a garden is a kind of public display, an act of outward grandeur. But your garden is to you an utterly different affair: it is an act of private worship."

"How nicely you say that, Don Enrique! It pleases me to hear you say that! It pleases me enormously!"

He smiled. "And yet, Señora, for all that—you are, I think, really a much more outwardly active person than I am. Whatever force I have, I reserve for my poetry; and I am not really happy, ever, when I am dealing with external events in the raw. You, however, seem to me to have an unlimited capacity for facing reality."

"Do you think so? I do not seem to make much use of that capacity, if I indeed have it."

He smiled again. "Perhaps, in small ways and in isolated episodes, you affect the course of reality more than you are aware of."

"I wonder," she said. Then her mind turned to Castellano again. "Tell me, what is the status of the play now?"

"*El Torbellino Fuerte?* Almost nothing more remains to be done; I have merely put it aside for a few weeks; then I shall reread it with fresh eyes, and perhaps find some last improvement that I can make. In view of your approval the other night, there is one special addition I may wish to make to the book—a very special addition." . . . He hesitated in embarrassment. "I will talk to you of the matter at another time; I may have an important request to make of you."

She nodded noncommittally. All she said was: "I still think it your masterpiece, Don Enrique." She would not press him for greater clarity of speech just now. But there was a small flutter of delight in her heart; for she suspected that it was Castellano's intention to propose that he dedicate the book to her. The pride and joy of such a tribute, coming from him, would be an important thing in her life. But she must let her strange, shy, beloved friend approach the subject in his own way and at his own time.

are as common as Ford cards in Detroit or as generals in Mexico City. Usually they are treated with kindness; they are humble gentle creatures; their market value is from fifteen to twenty pesos. They awaken no interest on the part of the spectator. Only this one burro is likely to go down in the annals of history—along with the unforgettable sparrows that were blessed by St. Francis of Assisi, centuries ago.

Many of the natives who live on the shores are the owners of burros. Every day the patient sad-faced little animals can be seen trudging through the streets of the town, carrying loads of firewood or vegetables or charcoal or earthen pots that are to be offered for sale in the market place. Or sometimes the burro will have a rider—a woman with a black shawl over her head, or a man who wears a straw sombrero—whose saddle is a folded piece of sacking and whose bridle is nonexistent: the equestrian guides the small steed by thumping its nose, right or left, with a stick, and then applies the stick to the animal's rump with a loud whack in the hope of evoking a little more speed or at least preventing complete stagnation of progress. In Chapala, the lives of burros are obscure, unhonored and unsung. So it was an unusual event when one burro achieved a degree of fame that set it apart forever from all the others of its race, and became known to the whole village as The burro of Chapala.

"See—there comes 'The' Burro!" one woman would say to another, pausing in the street and pointing at an insignificant long-eared creature that was moving somnolently toward them along the cobbled highway.

"Oh, is that 'The' burro!" her friend would reply gig-

gling. "How do you know he is? He looks just like all the others."

"Because that young fellow who's driving it is Felipe—and I know that Felipe has no burro except 'The' burro!"

"Well, well, so that is 'The' burro! *Maria Santissima!* Who would have thought it!" And then, as the meek little animal and its slightly sullen owner passed, the two women would embrace each other with hysterical laughter, and cry out—"Oh, look at his tail! Look at his tail!" Then they would stare at the tail with renewed laughter. And the odd thing about their behavior was that there was nothing in the least odd about the burro's tail: it was a perfectly normal tail.

A stranger would have thought that the women had lost their wits. But not so Felipe. His face would darken with disgust and wrath. He knew only too well what the women were laughing at, and why The burro was famous, and why its tail was a thing that would be talked about for countless generations.

Felipe knew that the burro had acquired its fame very suddenly, one summer morning, as it was trudging along to market. It had come some miles from the countryside, and two large faggots of firewood were tied onto its back. It had a ragged piece of rope around its neck for a halter, and behind it walked Felipe; he kept prodding it with a sharp stick.

On that fateful morning Felipe was barefooted, as usual; he wore ragged blue trousers, a torn white shirt and a straw sombrero that looked as though it had been discarded by his great-grandfather. It was a warm day, and Felipe's shirt was wet through with perspiration; his dark face was cross

and tired. The burro's face did not look cross but it looked tired and sad, and it moved its small hooves reluctantly along the cobbled streets of the village. Felipe swore at it continually and prodded it with his stick. In common with most of the Mexican peasants—whose lives are one long acceptance of poverty and hardship from birth to death—he had little awareness of the suffering of animals. His youth—that lucky egotism of youth—made him even more insensitive than the average, and the unfortunate burro had many trials to bear.

Just now they were passing the high whitewashed walls of the Villa Colima. Over the top of the wall appeared the green foliage of mango-trees, date-palms and jacorandas, and beyond them could be seen the red-tiled roof of the house with a great wave of bougainvilleas sweeping up the walls. Felipe had often been inside the gates of the enclosure, bringing firewood or charcoal for sale, and he knew the stone-flagged patio and the formal gardens that lay between the terrace of the house and the blue waters of Lake Chapala.

And he knew well the remarkable chatelaine of the Villa Colima—that strange, very old Englishwoman, Señora Morton, who had come to Chapala before Felipe was born, and who lived here alone in cheerful peace, tending her garden and stalking about the village with her walking-stick to give charity or scoldings or good advice to anyone who was in need of such things. Everyone knew her and she knew everyone; she spoke fluent Spanish, and was the friend of the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It was reputed that she had been a close friend of the great President Díaz—the terrific Don Porfirio—in the days when

he was at the height of his power and had a summer residence here at Chapala; and it was certain that she was also the friend of the poorest and most miserable of her neighbors.

If anyone had asked Felipe how old he thought Señora Morton was, he would have replied quite seriously that she was one hundred and fifty years. His ideas of time were not very accurate; and even if he had known that she was precisely eighty, he would not have regarded that span of years as sufficiently important and honorable to attribute to her. It was the custom of all the old native women to boast that they were a hundred; and Felipe believed them. So, because of his respect for Señora Morton and because of his slight fear of her clear mind and sharp tongue, he would wish to add a complimentary fifty years to the conventional hundred. One hundred and fifty years, he thought, was surely a respectful enough age to attribute to anybody.

He had known her ever since he was a little boy. In those days he had always gone each year to the Christmas parties which she gave in her garden and to which she invited all the children of the neighborhood. There had been popcorn and balloons and animal cookies and candy in silver-foil—all very strange and very exciting. And there had always been a puppet show, too wonderful for words, in which knights and giants and dragons and princesses came right out on the stage and talked in squeaky voices. Now Felipe was a grown man, and of course he could no longer go to these parties—which was too bad. But ever since he had grown up and had begun to sell firewood to Señora Morton, she had given him a peso each Christmas as

a present; so his feelings toward her were very kindly in spite of the fact that she often scolded him with severe sincerity when he failed to cut the firewood to the right length or when he was a week or two late in making a promised delivery of charcoal.

Today as he was passing the high gateway of her villa, the heavy door was flung open and there stood Señora Morton herself. She was talking energetically to her white-clad houseboy Pedro, giving him her orders for the day. She was dressed in white, with a large straw hat on her head and her black ebony walking-stick in her hand. Her alert wrinkled face peered out at the street. She recognized Felipe, and smiled. He respectfully took off his hat and stopped prodding his burro.

"God be with you, Señora," he said.

"God be with you, Felipe," she replied.

He gave his burro a discreet poke, and moved onward down the cobbled street. Old Señora Morton remained standing in her gateway, tapping the stones with her stick while she continued to talk to Pedro.

As Felipe plodded along, he wished that he were smart enough to have Pedro's nice easy job. That Pedro! A white uniform, so nice and cool-looking, and an air as if he were somebody important! Pedro didn't have to sweat at cutting wood or burning charcoal, and then haul it into town on the back of a lazy good-for-nothing burro. All he had to do was wait on table and do a little bit of cleaning up and things like that. It wasn't fair. Felipe grew angry as he reflected on these matters and gave his burro an unnecessarily sharp jab with the stick.

Onward the little beast plodded, slower and slower. Just

beyond the Villa Colima there was a slight upward slope of the road. There the burro slackened its pace and finally stopped. Its head drooped, its ears were sunk in despondency. It closed its eyes, and opening its mouth it emitted a long feeble bray.

Felipe grew enraged. His burro was disgracing him. He was just as tired as the burro was—but he had to go on.

He seized the stick firmly and began to beat the burro. Though the animal flinched at each stroke, it refused to move onward.

"Ah!" Felipe said viciously. "So you won't, won't you?"

Then he resorted to something which he knew was wicked, but he could not help that. He began to twist the animal's tail. This is a cruel form of torture, not generally resorted to by the Mexican peasants. The pain probably mounts into the regions of agony.

The burro gave a start of anguish, and went on. Felipe was not content. Every few steps, he would again give the tail a vicious twist. Each time he did so, the burro shivered.

Suddenly Felipe was startled to hear an angry voice behind him. He looked around, and beheld Señora Morton thumping up the street with her stick. She was flushed with rage and with exertion; she had to pause a moment and recover her breath before she could say to him what she was burning to say.

"You stop that, do you hear, Felipe! You wicked, wicked fellow! I've a mind to give you a good beating with my stick! How do you dare to be so cruel to that poor little animal that serves you so well? Didn't God put a heart into you when he made you? Don't you ever again let me catch you doing such a bad thing to a dumb animal!

They feel things just the way you do, you wicked boy—even if they can't howl the way you would if somebody hurt you! Do you hear what I say? Do you hear what I say?"

She glared at Felipe, her face contorted with pain and anger. She turned and patted the nose of the little burro.

"There, there, little fellow!" she said. "Nobody's going to do that to you again."

"Yes, Señora, yes, Señora," Felipe said abashed. The old lady had a way about her, when she was angry at you, that was very frightening.

"Well, now you mind what I say! And after the market this afternoon, when you are on your way home, you stop at my house. I want to give that poor beast some sugar. And don't you imagine that I am going to give you yourself a thing, because I'm not—not a thing! You are a bad boy, Felipe!"

"Yes, Señora, yes, Señora."

She glared at Felipe, gave the burro a final pat, and started briskly up the street toward the center of the town. Felipe marveled that a woman of one hundred and fifty could move so actively and thump the cobblestones so hard with her stick.

He gave the burro a cautious poke; the beast trudged slowly on and Felipe followed. Presently he saw Señora Morton turn at a corner and disappear down a side street that led toward the lake. Good riddance, he thought. Then a sullen anger awoke in him. After all, this was his burro, not hers. What right had she to interfere? He suddenly gave vent to the spleen which the episode had aroused in him.

At first he merely beat and prodded the burro. Then as his taste for cruelty grew by what it fed on, he began again to twist its tail. He was well aware that the tail is merely the extension of the backbone, and he delighted to think what waves of lightning-pain were shooting up through the whole spinal column.

The animal responded to this stimulus by breaking into a feeble run. Felipe scampered after it. As the burro slowed down its pace, Felipe would soon catch up with it and begin the tail-twisting again.

By the time they got within sight of the market place, Felipe was very hot and angry, and the burro was almost exhausted by pain and fatigue. In a final burst of speed, goaded by the dreadful tail-twisting, it ran across the cobbles of the Plaza, staggered to the entrance of the market square, slipped on the stones, and fell headlong. Felipe kicked it viciously, but it refused to rise to its feet.

He prodded it, he jerked at the halter, he bit one of its ears. In vain. The animal lay inert, with half-closed eyes.

By this time a crowd of idle market-goers and small boys had gathered round. "You'll have to carry him home, Felipe!" "Why don't you get yourself a real burro, Felipe?" "Don't you ever feed your burro?" "Let him smell your pulque-breath, Felipe!" was shouted at him ironically by some of the urchins, who were greatly enjoying the scene of Felipe's discomfiture.

Felipe grew furious. He paid no attention to the derisive remarks, but placed his foot on the burro's rump, seized fresh hold of the tail, and began to twist and pull with his whole strength. A murmur of disapprobation arose from many of the crowd: Felipe disregarded it.

Suddenly he heard a fierce voice behind him.

"What is this? What is this?"

He turned, and saw that there stood Señora Morton. She was pale with fury, and the cane shook in her hand.

"You wretched boy!" she cried to him, glaring. "The minute I turn my back, you begin abusing this poor little creature again! Oh, what a wicked fellow you are! What would your grandmother say? Maybe she is looking down from heaven now and seeing you. She is weeping with shame. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

She went up to the burro and gently tried to persuade it to get up onto its feet. It refused to stir.

"Take those loads of wood off its back!" she commanded. "Can't you see that it is too tired to be able to rise with all that burden on it?"

Felipe sullenly went up to the prostrate animal and unfastened the ropes. The two big faggots slipped to the pavement.

"Carry those into the market," Mrs. Morton commanded.

By this time, several dozen people had gathered to witness the odd scene. Señora Morton was a familiar figure to them all, but they had never seen her in precisely this rôle before. Some of them who had just arrived were a little puzzled by her activities. One woman whispered to another: "Do you think that the Señora has suddenly grown so poor that she has to come to the market to sell wood? How sad!" "No, you fool! Just watch! She is going to give Felipe a beating in a minute, because he was almost killing his burro." "Oh, is that it! Well, I hope she does. Felipe is not nice to his burro." "No, he is not. And it is a good little burro, too. See how tired the poor little thing is."

While Felipe was dragging the two faggots to that part of the market place where wood merchants gather, Mrs. Morton succeeded in coaxing the burro to rise to its feet. It stood there with a sad expression, its long ears drooping and its legs trembling. Mrs. Morton patted its nose. It gave no sign of being aware of her attentions. She thrust her hand into her black handbag, took out a copper coin, and handed it to one of the gaping urchins. She pointed to where several vendors of sugar cane were squatting on the dusty pavement.

The urchin grinned his comprehension, seized the coin and ran to one of the sugar cane merchants. Handing over the coin, he received two short sticks of the highly appreciated commodity. He dashed back to Señora Morton and handed her his purchase. She gave one of the sticks back to him.

"Many thanks, gracious Señora!"

She smiled at him. "You are very welcome." Then she turned to the burro and offered it the other stick. After one suspicious sniff, the animal proceeded to munch the cane with contentment. Mrs. Morton patted it. "I'll take care of you," she said consolingly.

When Felipe returned from depositing his firewood in the market place, he had to push his way through a considerable circle of spectators to regain the side of his beast. Mrs. Morton was still patting it; and the good-humored crowd, which always enjoyed any little unusual happening, was laughing and murmuring its approval of the funny old English señora. She was smiling and chatting with one or another.

Her face hardened when she saw Felipe.

"Felipe—will you promise me, in the sight of all these people and in the sight of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that you will not load your burro so heavily, and that you will never again twist its tail?"

Felipe's expression grew dark. He had been made a public spectacle of this morning, and his dignity was hurt.

"It is my burro," he said sullenly.

There was a silence. The crowd waited attentively.

Suddenly Mrs. Morton spoke. "Felipe, this poor brute has been shamefully abused. You must get a stronger burro. You cannot have this one any longer. I am going to buy him from you. From now on he belongs to me, and you cannot touch him. I know exactly what he is worth. He is worth eighteen pesos—or will be, when he is decently fed and kindly treated. But I will give you twenty for him. And that is settled!"

Felipe stared at her astounded. "Sell my burro? Twenty pesos?"

Mrs. Morton turned and appealed to the crowd. "Isn't twenty pesos a fair price? Isn't it? What do you all say?"

"Yes, Señora! . . ." "Yes, yes, Señora, yes! . . ." "Yes, a fair price! . . ." "No, no, no! sixteen pesos would be enough! . . ." A babel of a dozen voices answered her—and though she was listening carefully for some note of dissent, she heard none. Then she knew she was right in her guess as to the value of the burro.

She confronted Felipe again.

"You see? You see what they all say? It is my burro now. I'm going to take him home with me at once. And you stop at my house this afternoon on your way home and I'll give you your twenty pesos. And I'll give you one

extra, to have prayers said for the salvation of your own sinful soul! And with the twenty pesos you can buy a bigger and stronger burro for your business. You hear me? You hear me?"

Felipe was dumbfounded. At last he recovered his speech.

"But Señora—my burro? My little Jesusito? But Jesusito will not go with you. He is my burro. He will not go with anybody but me. He knows that I am his father and his mother."

The crowd burst into laughter at this naïve plea of Felipe's. Felipe was embarrassed. Yet he stuck stubbornly to his assertion. "He knows that I am his father and his mother," he repeated dully. "Have I not given him his food all these years? What would he do without me? He will not go with anybody else! He will not!"

"We'll see!" said Mrs. Morton grimly. "Here, you, my friends!"—she addressed the good-tempered little crowd that had by this time completely surrounded the three principal actors in this scene—"Please be so kind as to clear a way for me and my burro—*my* burro!—out there toward the Plaza."

With a scuffling and hurrying of bare or sandaled feet, and with a few bursts of laughter, the crowd willingly opened a path for her. They greatly relished the prospect of seeing the dignified English lady leading her newly-acquired burro across the wide space of the Plaza. What a queer old Señora she was! She was capable of doing anything that came into her head. But a heart of gold, a heart of gold!

Mrs. Morton, completely composed, took hold of the ragged rope that was the burro's halter.

"Come, Little One," she said coaxingly. "Maybe Felipe is right when he says that he is your father and your mother —but I'm your grandmother!"

The crowd gave a delighted guffaw of appreciation. Some of the men slapped their thighs. "What a Señora!" . . . "You can't get the better of her!" . . .

They watched her attentively as she patted the little animal and started to lead him away. They were not sure that the contest between her and Felipe was over yet: they hoped that it was not.

"Come, Little One!"

The burro planted its feet stubbornly, and refused to stir.

She coaxed. She petted. She pulled. It was in vain. She glanced at the crowd and threw up her hands in a gesture of mock despair.

"Perhaps he is illegitimate," she remarked, with a deprecatory gesture toward heaven. "Doesn't know his own grandmother!"

Her clowning was precisely to their taste. They laughed their applause.

Felipe had not smiled once. Now he advanced and spoke gravely.

"Permit me, Señora! You will see! I have spoken the truth about Jesusito. Please drop the halter."

She did so.

Felipe did not touch the halter. He merely said: "Come! Come, come, come, Jesusito! Come with me, Jesusito."

He turned his back and walked confidently toward the Plaza.

The burro hesitated for a moment, waggled its ears, and then meekly followed.

When Felipe heard the sound of the small hooves pattering over the cobblestones behind him, he turned in triumph.

"You see, Señora—you see?"

Then he addressed the crowd: "You have seen! Now, say—whose burro is this? Whose?"

Several voices called out: "Yours, Felipe!" . . . "Yours, friend!" . . . "Felipe's burro, all right, all right!" . . . Some of the voices were laughing; others were as serious as that of Solomon when he delivered his famous and weighty judgment in the case of the two mothers who claimed the child.

Mrs. Morton made a gesture of resignation. She knew defeat when she met it. She had met it now. But like all good generals, she had resources in reserve that might enable her to inflict heavy losses on the enemy even as she retreated.

"Yes, Felipe. I see that the burro is yours. But . . ." she paused dramatically. She waited until the crowd had become silent and attentive. "—but, Felipe, will you not sell me at least his tail? I'll give you two pesos for his tail."

Felipe stared at her. The crowd listened carefully.

"But, gracious Señora—how can I sell you his tail? I wouldn't cut off Jesusito's tail. That would be bad of me. He needs it for the flies."

"I do not ask you to cut it off. I ask you to leave it just where it is. But I will pay you two pesos for it just the same—and then it belongs to me. Then you cannot touch

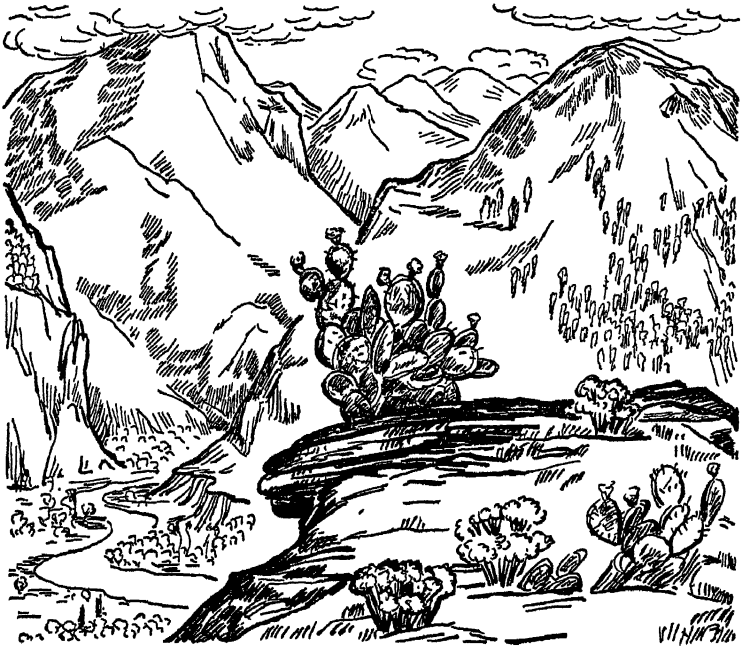
it: If you do, it will be trespass, trespass!—and I will have you arrested and put in jail! Do you hear me? Do you hear me? The burro's tail is mine!"

With a gesture that brooked no refusal, she took two silver pesos from her black bag and thrust them into the hand of the bewildered Felipe.

Then she turned suddenly and walked thumping with her stick across the Plaza—and did not look back.

Behind her arose a tumult of laughter, assuring her that her judgment in the case had met with the approval of the crowd:—that it was the official decree of the community that her verdict had been correct, and that her action had received a sanction from which no appeal to a higher court would ever be possible. Felipe would have to accept facts as they were. The tail was hers.

From that day onward, the little animal, whose name "Jesusito" is not uncommon among the burros of devout Mexican peasants, has been known in Chapala as The burro. His preëminence over all other existing burros has never been questioned.



IV

THE TWENTY-FIRST LION

PEDRO, NEAT in his brown sandals and his white uniform, with his black hair carefully slicked down as usual, came out onto the terrace where Mrs. Morton was reading. He was hastily buttoning the last button of his jacket.

"The Señora called me?"

Mrs. Morton took off her spectacles, looked up at him, and smiled. "To tell you the truth, Pedro—and one should always tell the truth—I did not call you." She paused. "I was merely talking to myself. But now that you are here,

a thought comes into my mind—and I do want you to do something for me."

"Yes, Señora?"

"Come over here . . . Sit down in that chair."

Pedro, perplexed, obeyed.

"Now light one of your filthy cigarettes—and don't sit up so straight! Relax! Be comfortable! Imagine that you are sitting in a *cantina* and talking to some drunken friend of yours."

Pedro tried to do as he was told: his expression indicated that he had fears for his mistress' sanity.

"Now, what I want of you is this.—I have been reading in the newspaper of the lies and confusions going on in the outside world—far off from our beautiful Lake Chapala. And I don't want to think of those horrible things any longer. So it would be nice if you would do what you promised you would do some day—tell me about some of those witches and ghosts and sacred mountain lions you have often said are living hereabouts. Will you?"

Pedro was embarrassed. "Oh, Señora, but I do not know much about them. The old people are the ones who know best about those things. I know only what I have heard."

"Well, tell me what you have heard. Now, to start with —are there many witches around here?"

Pedro reflected seriously and shook his head.

"No, Señora, there are not as many witches now as there used to be."

"Do you know any witches yourself?"

Pedro hesitated. "Well, some people say that old Maria Gomez is a witch, and that if she does not like people she makes them get sick. My cousin Juan says she bewitched

him once, at New Year's time two years ago. It happened like this: She was angry at him because one day he and she happened to be walking toward each other on a path in the Plaza near the band-stand—and suddenly Juan saw ahead of him on the ground a silver peso which somebody had dropped—probably one of those drunken *politicos* from Guadalajara. Old Maria saw it too. They both ran to pick it up, but Juan got there first and put the peso in his pocket. Maria was furious; she said she had seen it first, and that it was hers and that he must give it to her; and he just laughed at her. She went away mumbling bad words and shaking her head up and down with a wicked expression on her face.

"Next day Juan was sick, with pains in his stomach; he thought he was going to die, and he said he thought that old Maria had bewitched him. But I do not know if this is true—for the night before, he had spent the whole of his peso on a bottle of cinnamon-and-alcohol and some beer and a bag of candy and some peanuts, and two melons that were a great bargain, their owner having priced them cheaply because they were a little too ripe and he was afraid they would not keep until tomorrow. And Juan had a fine evening enjoying these things all by himself. And I myself think that perhaps they had as much to do with his stomach ache as old Maria Gomez did. But Juan always got cross when I said that to him; he said that I was not a good cousin, and that I was always trying to make little of him, and to make him believe that nothing wonderful ever happened to him, and that I have no music in my soul. What do you think about it, Señora?"

"I think you have a great deal of music in your soul,

Pedro. And you had better thank God that you have a little common sense in your soul, too. As to Juan—it would not greatly surprise me if the melons and the candy and the pulque had something to do with his troubles."

"I am going to tell Juan what you have said, the very next time I see him!"

"Yes, do! I have always thought that he was a fool . . . And now go on—go on and tell me some more about witches. And light another of those horrid cigarettes if you want to; I don't mind."

Pedro lighted another cigarette.

"In the olden days, Señora, there must have been many more witches than there are now. Some of them could change themselves into animals—such as a burro that kicked people, or a mad dog, or a scorpion.

"The way these witches did it (if the Señora will pardon!) was to strip themselves strip-stark-naked, and rub themselves from the shoulders to the knees with the fat of dead bats, and then make a wish. Then they could turn into any animal they wanted to be, and the spell lasted until dawn.

"My grandfather knew a man who had a terrible experience with one of these witches. This man was walking home one night from the *cantina*, and in a dark lane there sprang out at him an enormous black cat with eyes of fire —eyes as big as saucers—and claws of steel. The cat leaped onto his shoulder and tried to dig into his eyes. But this man was quick; he drew his big knife out from under his belt and slashed at the animal, and he cut off one of the front paws and two toes of the other front paw. The cat shrieked like a dying soul in hell, and ran limping away

into the darkness; and the man went home and hid under the bed. Next day an old woman whom people had long suspected of being a witch was found dead in her house; a trail of blood led in from the road, and (if the Señora will pardon!) the old woman lay naked on her bed, with one hand cut off and two fingers missing from the other hand:—and there was a pot of bat's grease standing right there on the floor beside her! Then of course everybody knew that she was a witch. My grandfather told me her name, but I do not remember now what it was."

Mrs. Morton seemed to hear ancestral footsteps echoing from the past. She wondered by what odd process this legend, which she knew to have been current in many forms throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, had got to Chapala. Had it come over with the Spanish, or had it had an independent origin here on the American continent? She made no comment, and waited for what more might come.

(2)

Pedro went on: "There are not many witches nowadays, but there are plenty of ghosts. Plenty! There is one old Aztec ghost, back in the mountains to the north, who is a very bad ghost. He is the guardian of a secret gold mine that is hidden there; it has been lost ever since the coming of the white men. Once in a while, some hunter in the mountains finds the mine by accident—and there it is, with great boulders of pure gold gleaming out of the sides of its walls, and the dust underfoot is shining yellow flour. Nobody can imagine how much gold there is there. And then the hunter starts to come back to the village and

tell the people of his luck and be the richest man in the world. Oh, he is happy! And then—then the ghost does something terrible to him.

"One man was pushed over a precipice, and when people found him he was too near death to be able to explain clearly just where the mine was: he could only say that it was beside a black wall of rock in a deep ravine—and then he died.

"Another man who found the mine was hit on the head by a falling stone, so that all his memory went away from him before he got to the village, and he could not recall the way back to the mine. Another one, just before he got to the village—just when he was bursting with joy at the thought of his future riches—he was clawed in the face by a mountain cat which the ghost had sent after him; and he became blind, and could never see to find his way back to the gold mine.

"So it has been with all men who have found it. I myself, Señora, I would not go to hunt for that mine—not if you promised me all the gold in the world, and sent ten government soldiers with me to protect me. For if I found it, the ghost would find some way of destroying me. He is a very terrible ghost—one of the worst I know."

"I should think so!" Mrs. Morton agreed. "But what use can the ghost make of all that gold? Why does he want it?"

"Nobody knows, Señora."

"But tell me, Pedro—are all ghosts bad?"

"No, Señora, there are good ghosts too. My grandfather knew a man—I think his name was Pedro, just like mine —whose father, a very good man, was killed suddenly in a fight in a *cantina.* This Pedro knew that his father had a

bag of silver pesos, for he could remember that sometimes when he was half asleep on Saturday nights he had seen his father leave the hut with a spade in one hand and some pesos which he had earned in the other—and then he heard sounds of digging—and then after a while his father would come back with the spade but without the pesos. And the next day, Sunday, this Pedro's father would always smile and pat him on the head and say: 'Pedro, some day when you are older, you are going to school, way off in Guadalajara, and learn to be a teacher!'

"But after his father's death, this Pedro did not know where the pesos were buried. He tried digging here and he tried digging there, again and again; but it was no use. Then one night his father's ghost came back and stood before Pedro. He was pale and thin, and he gave out a smell of dampness and the deep earth. But he smiled and made the sign of the Cross—only good ghosts can do that—and he did not speak, but motioned Pedro to rise from his bed and take up the spade and follow.

"The ghost floated like a mist across the bean-field that was behind the house and stopped under a big pepper tree that was there. Here he pointed to a certain spot on the earth, made the sign of the Cross again, and vanished. Pedro, right there in the moonlight, began to dig—though it was all like a dream to him. He dug and he dug—and after a while his spade struck something hard. He went on digging until he finally uncovered it. It was a bag of silver pesos!"

"Well!" Mrs. Morton said, "I hope when he woke up in the morning he didn't find that they were just ghost-pesos and had vanished like the ghost?"

"Oh, no Señora! I know they were real pesos—for my grandfather sold this Pedro a very good burro for fifteen pesos, and he took some of these pesos in payment—and my grandfather would not have been such a fool as to take them if they had not been real pesos. Now, that was a good ghost!"

"I should think so!" Mrs. Morton agreed. "Probably ghosts are like people—some good and some bad."

"That is exactly it, Señora," Pedro responded, nodding his head sagely. "A bad man will make a bad ghost, just as a little chicken will lay a little egg. A ghost is the same in life as in death; you cannot turn a scorpion into a humming bird."

"But sometimes, Pedro, you can make men bad or good, depending on how you treat them. Is there no way of making bad ghosts into good ghosts?"

"I do not think so, Señora. Then it is too late. There is nothing to do then but try not to make the bad ghosts angry at you. The Aztecs used to try to please the ghosts by sacrificing hundreds, thousands of men to them. They used to hold a man down on the altar and cut his heart out with obsidian knives. But we do not do that any longer."

"So that is why the Aztecs had those horrible human sacrifices, is it?"

"Well, Señora, some people say they did it to please the ghosts, and some people say they did it to please the gods. My grandfather always thought it was for the gods."

"But why did they think that dreadful act would please the gods?"

A subtle change of expression came over Pedro's face. A gleam of masterful secret understanding appeared in his

eyes. "Oh, they did it because it was such a big, important thing to do! You see, Señora—if you give the gods some corn, some sugar cane, some pulque—that is a good gift; but it is little. If you give them a chicken or a pig, that is more. But if you kill a man for them, that is the biggest thing you can give them, and that pleases them very much."

Pedro's eyes shone with a cruel fanatic light and his features hardened. Across the centuries, the ancient blood of his race was speaking through him; he seemed for the moment utterly and tragically alien to Mrs. Morton. He lifted his gaze and stared upward. It was as if there were pounding in his ears the thunder of the terrible sacrificial drums on the *teocalli* and the frenzied cries of the mob of worshipers below; she could almost see in his hands the black obsidian knife and the dripping heart of the victim; his muscles stiffened: he poised there transfigured: he had become High Priest of the Sun.

"What wicked folly, Pedro! You don't think your own God would like that, do you?"

His face softened. He was once more the Pedro she had known and trusted for so long.

"Oh Señora, no! The Blessed God in Heaven is different. That is because He has received the biggest sacrifice of all—one that lasts Him forever. He does not want more sacrifices now. He does not need more blood."

She groped her way through these enigmas. "You mean, do you, that the Crucifixion of Christ satisfied God's need of other sacrifices?"

"Yes, Señora, that is it. When men gave the blood of the Divine Jesus to his Father God, that satisfied Him. The

priest has told us that God does not want any more human sacrifices."

"I am sure the priest is right about that." She turned away to hide her own confusion. Pedro's interpretation of the Crucifixion as men's deliberate sacrifice to propitiate a blood-lusting deity had surprised her and given her a frightening glimpse into the dark abysses of the human mind. From her sweet-natured father she had learned to view the awful hours of the Passion on Golgotha with veneration, even though not with orthodox religious acceptance; and that scene, in her imagination, was shrouded in a mist of dusk and agony which she had no wish to disturb with irreverent footsteps. Too many hearts had bowed themselves before that Hill for it to be a suitable place for cynicism now. But Pedro's words astounded her. Not even her own skeptic heart could have devised, in some moment of bitterness, Pedro's naïvely sacrilegious perversion of the central Christian *mythos*. It seemed to her that there persisted in this gentle Pedro of hers a core of savage and primitive elements that would remain forever incomprehensible to her.

She forced herself to smile at Pedro. "Don't let's talk any more about sacrifices now. Tell me some more wonderful stories—the stories that you remember most clearly out of the days when you were very young—the things that your grandfather talked about!"

Pedro reflected, but apparently in vain. He shook his head.

"Light another of your nasty cigarettes. Then perhaps you'll remember."

Pedro lighted a cigarette. In the very act of doing so, his

face became animated as he recalled what he had been trying to remember.

"Oh yes, Señora. Now I remember every word of it. I do not know if this story is true. Perhaps it is not."

"Tell me, anyway."

(3)

"My grandfather told me this, when I was a little boy. It is a very ancient story: his own grandfather had told it to him, and said that it must be true, because his grandfather had learned it from his grandfather, who came from lands far to the south—the Place of the Strange Birds." Pedro faltered, hesitated, paused like a child that fears to open a mysterious door. "I wonder if I can really remember it?"

Mrs. Morton calculated in her mind. The pedigree of this story covered nine generations. And beyond that? . . .

"Yes, Pedro?" she said, very quietly. She felt as if she were in danger of frightening away a shy humming bird or a black-and-gold-winged butterfly that was about to alight on her hand.

"Do you know, Señora, who Xotocutli is?"

"I'm sorry, I don't."

Pedro's face fell. "Then I cannot explain it, Señora."

"You need not explain. Is he a god?"

Pedro nodded.

"Well, perhaps I know Xotocutli in other lands, under a different name. Go on. I am sure your grandfather would have been glad to tell me this story."

Pedro recovered his self-assurance. "Señora, I do not

know if this tale is true. But this is what my grandfather told me:

"There was a great hunter whose name was Mita. He had other names also, but they were secret. Mita was not his true name. That is why he called himself Mita. It is dangerous to tell your true name.

"Mita would go out into the hills, if the people of his town were hungry, and with his arrows he would shoot one hundred deer, and three hundred rabbits, and six hundred pigeons. He would carry them all home on his back; and then all the town would cry out with joy, and everybody could eat again. He was a great hunter.

"Everybody loved and praised Mita, for he gave food to all the town. And Mita was proud that he was the greatest hunter.

"Sometimes he killed a mountain lion. But that was just because he was a proud hunter. For you cannot eat a mountain lion, Señora; his meat is not good. But Mita was proud every time he killed a mountain lion, for it showed what a brave man he was.

"One day, alone in the hills, Mita grew very proud. He had become angry that afternoon, for he had not killed a mountain lion that whole week, and he was tired of killing merely deer and rabbits and pigeons for the town. And he held up his hands toward the Lords of Tlalocan, and cried out: 'Give me the right, O Lords of Tlalocan, to kill twenty mountain lions!'

"He waited then in silence; but the Lords of Tlalocan did not reply.

"And then Mita grew angry, and he pointed to the earth, and cried out: 'You, O Mictlantecutli, Lord of the Dead,

I call upon you to give me the right to kill twenty mountain lions!'

"And he waited. But Mictlantecutli, Lord of the Dead, did not reply.

"And then Mita pointed at the mountains, and he shouted in fury: 'Since the Lords of Tlalocan and the Lord Mictlantecutli will not answer me—I call upon you, O dread Xotocutli, to promise me twenty mountain lions!'

"The mountains around him suddenly cracked. Big rocks fell. The ground shook under his feet. And a voice that made the earth heave up and down said: 'I grant your wish! But beware! He who deals with Xotocutli deals ill. Twenty lions are yours. But the twenty-first lion is sacred to me! Touch him not!'

"There was a terrible laugh, and the voice ceased. Mita was frightened. He staggered back to the town. And people mocked him because he had not brought even one rabbit or one pigeon this time.

"The next day, he went out to the hills. He had a new string to his bow, and plenty of good arrows with sharp obsidian points. He was determined to do well—and he did well. He killed twenty deer, twenty rabbits, twenty pigeons.

"And—no such thing had ever been heard of before—he killed twenty mountain lions.

"Never did a hunter return to the town in greater triumph. The people of the town threw flowers before him as he walked. The girls smiled at him. The young men shook him by the hand. The old women murmured—'Would that he were my son!' The old men nodded their

heads at him and smiled. The chief of police kissed him on both cheeks. Ah, he was a great hunter!

"But listen, Señora!

"Next day this Mita went out again, proud and happy. All the town watched him go. Halfway up the hillside, he shot a pigeon on the wing. The town made noises—'Wonderful Mita!' Then he shot a rabbit that was running with the speed of the wind. The town cried—'Beautiful Mita!' Then he shot a deer that was so far away that you could hardly see it. And the town called after him: 'Ah, who is like our Mita!'

"And then there came out of the woods a great mountain lion. He stood still, and looked at Mita with eyes of fire.

"Mita knew well that this was the twenty-first lion. He paused. And all the town cried out to him—'Shoot, Mita! Shoot, great hunter!'

"So Mita fitted an arrow to his bowstring and aimed carefully. He bent the bow with all his power, and loosed the arrow straight to the heart of the beast—and it fell dead.

"Then a laugh such as no man had ever heard before shook the hills and the clouds; and a voice like the grinding together of rocks in an earthquake said: 'Twenty were yours—but the twenty-first was mine! He deals ill who deals with Xotocutli!'

"And with that, the earth opened, and there was a puff of smoke, and the tall strong figure of Mita vanished in the smoke—and nobody ever saw him again."

"That, Señora, is what my grandfather told me. I do not know if it is true."

She had no idea what symbolism this story conveyed to Pedro. Probably it was symbolic of many things, as it had come down the ages. To her it meant the terrible god's warning to her own world, already red with the blood of generations of slaughtered men——a warning that there was, deep in the bowels of the earth or high in the spaces of the sky or obscure in the hearts of men themselves, an inexorable Power, a logic of inherent cause-and-effect, that would some day avenge itself. And that would be the day of the twenty-first lion.

V

THE MIGHTY WHIRLWIND

THE VILLA COLIMA, with its roofs of red tiles and its stucco walls half-covered with climbing bougainvillea, faced southward toward the lake. Sometimes that great body of water lay quietly blue in the sun; sometimes it raged in storm like a smoky dragon. And there were certain silent grey evenings when the Lords of Tlalocan, those mythical Aztec gods of mysterious nature, seemed to brood over it in almost visible presence.

To the north of the villa, beyond the garden-wall and

the cobbled roadway, rose steep hills on which shrubs and fibre-rooted trees maintained a precarious existence. Beyond the hills lay regions of cactus and waste, where no man lived—the natural haunt of the mountain lion, the rattlesnake, the deer, and birds.

Mrs. Morton paused on her terrace and stood looking out at the lake and the distant mountains. Today the mountains were a tawny yellow touched with streaks of pink, and the blue of the lake was a flat plate unrippled by any motion except the occasional passage of the sharp-prowed black boat of a fisherman.

She was thinking how odd it was that if she went away for two or three years—perhaps only for one year—she would find on her return that the lake was the same, but that this treasured garden of hers had been reclaimed by primeval nature and existed no more. There would certainly be none of the flowers she had brought out from England so long ago; and the trees would either be dead for lack of water, or half-dead under the attack of parasitic vines, or the storms of the lake would have washed away the soil from around their roots. Peace, tranquillity, a rational and intelligent order of existence for man—these things were to be bought only at the price of unceasing vigilance.

She thought: Nature is avid to destroy old forms of life, and eager to create new ones. Nature is like a bored human being, impatient for something different, no matter whether it turn out to be better or worse than that which now holds the center of the stage. Nature is forever shattering the present to create the future. Will my great-great-great-grandchildren be wiser and nobler than I was? I hope so, but I do not know. And Nature does not know, and has no

interest in my emotions about the matter. Nature is a flux, an impersonal current, whose essence is change; and the direction of the change may lead anywhere. The corpse of Socrates becomes the useful material to nourish the body of a blind groping worm; St. Francis of Assisi vacates the place where he stood, compassionate and sublime, to yield place to "his Brother the wind . . ."

The thought froze her lips a little, beyond the power of the afternoon sunlight to warm them.

In her youth, amid the well-tended hedgerows of the English countryside, she had been an unreflective cheerful girl; when it was a fair day and all was propitious, she laughed with pleasure; when it was a foul day and small misfortunes came to plague her, she did not repine. She accepted her simple life just as it was, without thought. Now in these later Mexican years, after so many decades of experience and with the inevitable end awaiting her at the brink of any tomorrow, her thoughts had not grown more gloomy but merely more deliberate, as she viewed herself as a small island past whose crumbling shores rushed the rapid and eroding river of time.

Mrs. Morton turned away from the lake-view and seated herself in one of the comfortable chairs that stood on the terrace. She put on her glasses and began to look over the newly-arrived copy of the *Weekly London Times*, to which she had subscribed for more than forty years. Her glasses were large-lensed horn-rimmed spectacles of ancient pattern; they gave her a learned appearance and a slightly comical resemblance to a venerable Chinese mandarin of bygone days.

Her reading this afternoon did not progress very well.

She could not focus her attention on this newspaper—this confusing record of events that had no sane meaning for such a mind as hers. The things she was reading made her feel inert, listless, disinclined to go on. A paralysis beset her. She felt no desire to investigate further into the evil picture there revealed—the picture of a world gone utterly and callously mad.

It was a world of international rivalry and chicanery whose poisonous wickedness had been unequaled at any time during her eighty years—a world of threats and evasions and cowardices and bullyings and lies. Japan murderously attacking China like a nasty little burglar seeking loot. Tragic Spain, torn by domestic strife that delivered it over to the power of foreign fascists. England in peril of losing not only its Empire but its very existence. Russia emerging from its decades of internal confusion and facing the world with the ambiguous threat and promise of a sphinx. Germany training its children to revert to the psychology of the blond barbarians of the Teutoburger Wald, and Italy disciplining its young in the pattern of the bullies of the gladatorial arena. America confused and aloof and divided, torn between the surging hopes of the progressives and the paralyzing fears of the conservatives. And the individual man, blind, blind, blind! "Miss Gloria Moose Attempts Flight to Pole." "Australian Cricketers Victorious." "Mussolini Kisses Grandmother of Ninety-six Descendants." "New York Stock Market Optimistic." Pictures of silly prize fights, and idiot-faced bathing-beauties, and horse races, and a man beating his wife, and the Prime Minister of England feeding a sparrow . . .

Was there a meaning behind all this modern chaos? If so,

her eyes were too old to see it. She who had always believed intensely in the dignity and seriousness of human life—she who had imagined a mysterious worth and wonder to reside behind the multiplex veil of appearances—now felt utterly heartsick. She doubted whether life was worth living, if after all the ages of upward struggle it had led only to this. She was wearied today by the picture of blind automatic termites who were without pity and without that degree of intelligence which enables real termites to combine for a useful collective purpose.

She saw the human race as a crowd of maddened people in a lifeboat; they had forgotten to row for land, and were struggling to hurl one another to the waiting sharks.

The *Times* fell to the floor beside her and flapped idly as its pages were stirred by the light breeze blowing from the lake. Mrs. Morton's blue-veined wrinkled hands rested listlessly in her lap.

"It would all be laughably grotesque if it weren't so heartbreaking," she said aloud. "Perhaps it would be well to believe, with Don Enrique, that these modern horrors are just 'a series of phantoms and legends, having only a symbolic significance.' "

(2)

Pedro came out to the terrace and announced that the vice-consul was calling on her.

She was surprised and pleased. She had not expected her old friend back so soon from his leave in England, and she welcomed him heartily. She had always liked him. Though his excellent factual mind and solid character had no such power to fascinate her as did Castellano's far-flung voyag-

ings of creative imagination, still this man was her fellow-countryman and trusty friend.

She listened eagerly to the news of his stay in England. The brief vacation had been very pleasant—seeing new plays, meeting old friends, and revisiting familiar scenes. But it had all been overshadowed and shot through by the apprehensions that darkened the whole of Europe with a growing sense of doom. He had found London shivering under the threat of air-raids; and in the country, women looked with peculiar lingering looks at the faces of their stalwart young sons. Of course nobody expressed a moment's doubt as to the ultimate triumph of England, good old England, in any conceivable war; yet still it was quietly recognized on every hand that in these days the word "triumph" could have only a relative meaning, and that at best it would describe a scene of such waste and ruin and death and chaos as no human imagination could truly picture.

"But what can we do?" the vice-consul said with a bitter haunted look in his eyes. "Germany forces us—and we shall muddle through somehow, as usual. We are really much better prepared now than we were for the last war."

"I should hope so," she said grimly. She remembered only too well the many splendid Englishmen, her friends and the sons of her friends, who had rushed to volunteer at the first alarm and had died in the wicked waste of England's finest blood during the early months of the war. Alas, alas, that such horrors should ever again afflict her beloved land!

"How soon?" she asked.

"Who knows? Next year or next month or next week. Nobody knows."

She thought with bitterness of what doubtless lay ahead. For years she had forseen it clearly. Whatever the past sins of her people, they did not deserve this outrage. But fury was unleashed in the world. She seemed to see the fanatical blood-shot eyes of Hitler glaring out from the thickets of some ancient Teutonic forest, the true symbol and survivor of primitive brute force in a world where a gentler wisdom was beginning to ripen. It would not ripen now: not for many a decade. Alas and alas . . . Yet even as she saw the vision of unspeakable horrors to come, one profound conviction remained in her heart. "I am without fear. I am quite without fear. It is impossible that England perish." She thought this, but did not speak it aloud.

Her thoughts drifted on from the land of her birth to the land of her adoption.

"I don't suppose there is any danger of Mexico being drawn in, is there?"

The vice-consul looked grave. "In a situation of this complexity, it would be rash to make any predictions. As you know, the world is so interlocked nowadays that what affects one country affects everybody."

"I know," she said, and was silent. She was thinking not of herself—she herself was perfectly safe—but of Pedro and his million brothers.

"And though you must of course not quote me as saying so," the vice-consul went on, "you are probably well aware that Mexico has been getting herself into a pretty kettle of fish, on her own account."

"In what way do you mean?"

"Oil. Oil, and socialism. And religion too."

"I know about the oil—but what has religion got to do with it?"

"Well, you know quite as well as I do what terrible difficulties the government has been in ever since it undertook to close the churches."

"Yes—and you have often agreed with me that it's impossible to accomplish that at one stroke. It will take time and education."

"I have not only agreed as to that—but I have never felt as sure as you that the Catholic Church isn't of quite a little benefit to Mexico."

"Sometimes I wonder whether you have ever read Mexican history, or whether you have just looked at the covers of the books! The Church has always helped the rich to hold the poor in subjection. But you and I can never see this matter in the same light. It's simply that I think the Church a poison and you think it a poultice. So there we stand!"

"So there we stand," the vice-consul assented amiably. "But some of our foreign friends are not so philosophical and good-tempered as you and I. They like to stir up rows. The Catholics in the United States have several times got hot under the collar over the anti-clerical laws here, and have tried to start something in Washington."

"But it's a purely domestic Mexican question, isn't it? What has any other government got to say about the matter, I should like to know?"

"My dear Mrs. Morton, I repeat that not everybody is as reasonable and philosophical and altogether angelical as you and I are. There has been a certain amount of heated talk about the duty of the United States to preserve reli-

gious liberty over the whole of this continent, and hence to interpose here on behalf of the Church."

"I never heard a more nonsensical idea. It can't possibly happen, can it?"

"No, I don't think so. At least, not all by itself. But it might have a certain influence on the oil problem. You see, if religious interests that are hostile to Mexico join up forces with oil interests that are hostile to Mexico, you may find that rather heavy pressure is brought to bear on various governments. And I don't think you realize, Mrs. Morton, how serious the oil controversy is."

"Now my dear young man"—it was thus that Mrs. Morton sometimes addressed the sixty-year-old gentleman in moments of slight irritation—"my dear young man, I have heard your views on the oil question many times. As you see it, certain farsighted investors came in here, and paid their good money for land and machinery and wages, and developed a huge oil industry. And then later a wicked socialistic-minded government got into power, and declared that the oil beneath the surface belonged to the nation, and passed laws that expropriated the companies. And now the companies want their respective governments to make Mexico pay them what they consider the speculative value of those vast oil-holdings. And Mexico not only hasn't the money to pay up just now, but it is not sure that it sees any very good reason why it should pay up, ever. Isn't that the situation?"

"Yes, roughly speaking, that is it. But you state it unfairly. I would add that you have not mentioned how advantageous it is to a backward country to have foreign capital attracted in to develop it."

"Very well. But I hear the other side, too. Don't tell me that your oil capitalists are philanthropists who came in here to benefit Mexico! Everybody knows that much of that oil-land was obtained by bribing the politicians of the Díaz days, and that the oil companies have never paid decent wages to their laborers, and that they have taken fabulous profits out of the country. Well, those days are over. Now the new, progressive, social-minded government steps in and says that no longer shall any group of speculators, foreign or domestic, drain this country dry of the natural wealth that belongs to the people. To the people, I say! There's been, in effect, a complete revolution of ideas; and the new government cannot and will not assume responsibility for the corrupt promises of the old régime. I wish you'd tell me what's wrong with that position?"

"Plain commercial honesty, Mrs. Morton. You forget that many of these new Mexican *politicos* aren't any more social-minded than Díaz or your fantastic General Gonzales."

"How you hated him, didn't you! But you know perfectly well that certain of these new leaders are high-minded idealists and patriots."

"I grant that. But there still remains an entire difference of social and political theory—between capitalist nations and socialist nations—and one that goes very deep, and that may cause God-only-knows-how-much trouble. Foreign nations—the United States as well as ourselves—have got to protect their investors' property abroad."

"I see no reason! I see no reason! If I choose to risk my money on speculative ventures in countries that are in a transition stage, whose business is it but my own? I alone

would profit if I guessed right; and I alone should suffer if I guessed wrong. Why drag my home government in?"

"I fear I cannot agree with you on this, Mrs. Morton," the vice-consul said patiently. "No business man would agree with you. It happens that your view is not the traditional one that has been taken by civilized governments for centuries; and no sudden change of policy is likely. To consent to your view would be to jeopardize our investments, not merely in Mexico, but all over the whole world."

"Oh, pish and tosh and a boiled owl! You sensible business men drive me mad! You know such a multitude of very complicated things that you can't see a few very simple things that are wrecking your world for you. Change is anathema to you."

The vice-consul was growing a little irritated; he stirred his feet restlessly; but he answered in a calm voice.

"In this case, no change of policy is possible. None whatsoever. England could not consent to it without a loss of prestige, nor could the United States. Naturally in the present situation, it is to the United States that everybody looks as the proper country to take the leadership in bringing pressure to bear."

"What kind of pressure?"

"Oh, there are trade agreements and boycotts and embargoes and various forms of action. But in the long run, all forms of pressure amount to the same thing. You have to be prepared to back them up with something."

"You mean—back them up with what?"

"I mean, back them up with force, armed force."

"You mean war?"

"Not necessarily. But it is not impossible that under cer-

tain conditions some government—say the United States, for example—might send an armed force down here and take over control of Mexico."

"Take over Mexico! Surely you are joking?"

"This isn't much of a matter to joke about, is it?"

"No," she said.

"But you see what I mean, don't you?—that a very idealistic people like the Americans—and they are idealistic, don't doubt it!—might eventually feel that the threat to religious liberty, and the infringement of commercial rights, and the growing strength of socialism here, all added up into a rather unfriendly situation to have next door to them."

"I don't believe a word of it. The United States doesn't want Mexico, and knows it couldn't have it if it did. Do you take the Americans for downright fools?"

"Far from it, Mrs. Morton. But not everybody is as tolerant of crazy socialistic theories as you are. The Americans, out of pure altruism, might feel that they ought to do something to help the Mexican people to liberate themselves from an unwelcome socialistic yoke that has been forced on them. They might feel that the people, the common people who don't understand or like the new government policies, would welcome them with open arms, as the saviors of their civil and religious liberties."

Mrs. Morton did not reply. The vice-consul saw that she had become so angry that she did not trust herself to speak. Her eyes blazed with a blue light from under her black eyebrows. Her lips were closed in a firm line. He had never before seen such a look of rage on her face.

When at last she spoke it was quite calmly.

"Do you believe any of that stuff yourself?"

"Not all of it—but some. I am merely telling you the various rumors I hear."

"One would suppose, my friend, that you had never, in all your long years here, ventured outside Mexico City. Don't you really know at all what these peasants are like?"

"Perhaps not as well as you do, I admit."

"Well, my dear young man, this country as a whole is too large an enigma for either you or me to understand. But sometimes I think I understand it a little better than you do. You know the laws and the treaties and the judicial decisions of the government; but I know the simple and humble people whose acceptance or rejection of those official acts is what, in the long run, makes Mexican history. You know who's who in Mexico City, but I know who's who in Chapala. The one group changes every few minutes: the other group hasn't changed since the days of Hernando Cortés."

"To me, both factors seem important."

"I'm glad you admit that. Now, are you too set in your ideas to be willing to try a simple little experiment with me?"

"Anything you like."

"Pedro is a typical example of these people. He knows nothing outside his own little world. All of these people are grindingly poor, but they don't know what to do about it, except once in a while to kill a few big landholders. They cling to the Church, and don't understand the government's attempts to educate them, and the Church aids and abets them in resisting every reform. They are a very melancholy, very secretive people; but sometimes you can

get at their real feelings if you go about it carefully. Now —if I call Pedro in, are you willing to ask him a few questions about the matters we have been discussing, and see if he will tell you anything?"

"Yes."

"You ask the questions. I won't guide or coach him."

"Very well."

She turned toward the doorway. "Pedro," she called out. "Come here, please."

(3)

The vice-consul smiled at Pedro as he entered, and nodded his head amiably.

"Pedro," Mrs. Morton said, "the Señor wishes to ask you a few questions about the way you and the other people feel concerning several matters of importance in all our lives. You just talk to him as freely as you would to me."

"Yes, Señora." He faced the vice-consul with a little stiffness of embarrassment.

"Well, Pedro," the Englishman began, "I wonder if you would mind telling me a little about this matter of the government closing the churches."

"It has been terrible, Señor, all that they have done. In lots of places they have sent soldiers to shut up the churches. Have they a right to do that? And when our people have gone and tried to get in, the soldiers have shot them, killed them—hundreds and hundreds. And our people have fought back. It has been terrible."

"Yes, Pedro, it is a very sad matter."

"Yes, Señor. And that is not all that the government does. It is bad, you do not know how bad. It won't let us

send our children to church schools: it tries to make us send them to government schools. And in the school it teaches them terrible things."

"What?"

"Oh, the teachers talk about things you shouldn't talk about—about how babies are made."

"Yes?"

"And they teach socialism."

"Just what is that?"

"That everything the Church says is a lie. That you mustn't obey your father. That your wife belongs to every other man just the way she does to you. That the stories the old people tell are all lies. That you can't own anything —not even the shirt you wear or the spade you work with. That you've got to work just for the government."

The vice-consul stole a slightly triumphant glance at Mrs. Morton. He himself could not have devised a more complete proof that these people did not understand socialism and did not like it anyway. Mrs. Morton ignored his look.

The vice-consul resumed his questions.

"Yes, Pedro, I see how you feel. Now, you people would like it, wouldn't you, if somebody made your government behave itself, and stop being socialistic, and let you have all the churches back again?"

"Yes, Señor, that is just what we long for."

"Well, now, Pedro, you know the United States is a very friendly nation. It takes a deep interest in the welfare of Mexico. Now, how would you view it if they came down here and straightened out certain business difficulties for you, and put a stop to all this socialism, and gave you

back forever the right to have your churches and your priests just the way you wanted?"

Pedro's face became a frozen mask of mystery. All expression disappeared from his lips. His eyes appeared to look inward into secret regions. He shook his head ambiguously and did not answer.

Mrs. Morton said gently: "Answer the Señor, Pedro. He is asking you a very important question. He wants to know what you think about this way of helping your country and your religion."

Pedro stared at her. His face worked convulsively and he ground his teeth together.

"Those dirty Gringos?" he said in a strained voice. "Do they want to come into our country, and be our masters like the *hacienda* owners and the *generales* and the *politicos*, and keep us from getting each his own piece of land? They think that we will be *peons* again? Let them try! Let them try!"

He turned away, overcome by emotion.

Mrs. Morton looked steadily at the vice-consul's face. His expression did not change. He leaned forward toward Pedro and asked confidentially:

"Well, tell me, Pedro, what would the attitude of you and your friends be if a friendly foreign army——not necessarily American, but any army——came into your country?"

Pedro was silent for a moment. Then he astonished Mrs. Morton by pulling up the white jacket of his uniform and groping at the waist of his trousers. In an instant he had extracted from beneath his clothes an ornate leather scabbard and from it drew a curved needle-pointed knife with

a foot-long blade. Its menace of death delivered with a thrust was like a snake's fang in mid-air.

"That is all we would do, Señor—only that! But it can do much! But it can do much! I have seen, I have seen, I have seen!" He stabbed ferociously at the air in all directions around him. Then he replaced the vicious knife in its sheath and returned the sheath to its hiding-place under his clothing.

Mrs. Morton turned to the vice-consul. "Does that explain anything you wanted to know?"

"Yes, Mrs. Morton. I think that is about all we need to ask . . . It was very kind of you, Pedro, to answer my questions. I am very much interested in Mexico, you know."

Pedro smiled, bowed, and turned to go. But in the doorway he paused hesitantly.

"Señora, do you think the Señor would like to hear one of the old stories that my grandfather told me? I remember one that is about animals."

She was surprised at his volunteering.

"Why yes, Pedro, do tell him. I was very much interested in those you told me."

Pedro turned to the vice-consul; his expression had lost all primitive fury of a moment ago; it was perfectly amiable and guileless.

"My grandfather told me that there was once a Coyote who came to see an old Rabbit, and said: 'Señor Rabbit, it is regrettable, but I am going to eat you.' The Rabbit said: 'Señor Coyote, since it is you who say this, what you have said is doubtless true. But before you eat me, pray let me introduce to you my seven children, so that they can profit

by your friendship and protection after I am gone to heaven.' The Coyote smiled so hard that his whiskers tickled his nose; he could almost smell the seven nice tender little Rabbits. And he said: 'I should be honored, Señor Rabbit, to be presented to your noble progeny—who shall in future enjoy the full benefit of my good offices.' So the Rabbit led the Coyote to the modest hole in the ground that was the entrance to his house, and he said: 'Pray precede me, Señor!' And the Coyote smiled, and stuck his nose into the hole; and the seven little Rabbits looked up at him in astonishment. And when he saw them, he smiled all the more, for he could almost taste their bones. And he was looking at them so hard that he did not see anything else. And then something very surprising happened. Suddenly seven little Rattlesnakes, who were keeping house with the little Rabbits, raised up their heads and made a noise—you know what kind of a noise! And each of the Rattlesnakes leaped from its coil and struck the Coyote on the nose with its fangs. And the Coyote gave a frightful howl of terror and pain, and pulled its head out of the hole, and lay down on the earth, and died . . . That, Señor, is the story my grandfather told me. He said it was true: I do not know myself."

The vice-consul stared at Mrs. Morton. "What have we here?" he asked in English.

She shook her head. "I have never seen him in this mood before. It is for you to interpret."

"*Adios, Señor!*" Pedro disappeared.

"Well, I see what you mean," the vice-consul said.

"I see, too," Mrs. Morton said. "I see even more than I had expected. And it rather terrifies me."

"Me, too. If the people really feel that way—if they hate foreign intervention even worse than they hate their confused, socialistic, anticlerical government—well, then where do we get with our oil?"

"If you are asking me for information," Mrs. Morton said, "I must reply that, with the best will in the world, I am unable to give it to you, for I haven't it. This isn't like an ordinary international disagreement. Mexico isn't really a nation yet: it is slowly taking shape as a nation. And I think there will be many terrible convulsions before the people finally shake off the grip which the landowners and the army and the Church have had on them for centuries, and become integrated. But that they will shake it off, never doubt! These poverty-stricken people are going to own their own land some day! And what will become of your oil-holdings in the meantime, I don't know and frankly I don't care."

He frowned. "That seems to me a rather dangerous attitude to take."

"Everything's dangerous! This country is just being born! Out there in those Mexican hills, in ways that you and I can know nothing about, the future of this nation is shaping itself. Nobody can tell how these millions of primitive people are going to react as they come in contact with the modern world. Maybe this is going to be a social-

ist country and maybe it's not. But you and I can't do anything about it."

"I'm afraid you're becoming practically a red yourself," he said gloomily.

"No, I'm not a red. I'm not anything in particular. Except that I'm not a blind woman. And I see this whole Mexican puzzle as part of something so much larger that I can't get as excited about the oil controversy as you do."

"How do you mean, 'larger'?"

She hesitated. "Well, I don't know that what I mean is worth going into, for you wouldn't agree at all with my views. But tell me—and this is relevant to what we're talking about—have you seen Don Enrique's play?"

"The one he read to you the night the tourist came—the one you were so enthusiastic about?"

"Yes. *El Torbellino Fuerte*, *The Mighty Whirlwind.* Has he shown it to you?"

"No. Is it really good?"

"It is magnificent. It rises to the heights of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound.* And when I say that, I say a great deal—for that is quite a standard of comparison. You will be greatly surprised when you see it published. Well, the reason I spoke of it now is because Don Enrique sees that larger picture, and expresses it with an eloquence that is unsurpassed by any living man."

"Could you tell me what the play is about?"

"I will try to give you some idea—though of course I can't convey to you the slightest trace of the power and beauty of *El Torbellino Fuerte* in its entirety.

"The play depicts the human drama of the future as

Castellano sees it. He views the past as a pestilential marsh where for century after century the generations of the earth have gone down in a jungle-struggle of one individual against another. They die and decay and sink to the bottom in a slimy detritus—the past history of life on this earth. But the gases that now are rising from this old lagoon are coming to the surface and exploding here and there—in the various social struggles that in our own time seem to be shaking the world to pieces, and in the international struggles which are merely large aspects of the social one. And they will grow worse—perhaps even in our own time —until the upward-eddying currents meet in the higher air and rush together into one mighty whirlwind, *El Torbellino Fuerte*, which will sweep over the face of the earth and purge the continents of their ancient jungles of greed and cruelty.

"After that terrific destruction of the outworn forms of society, there will arise in a cleansed world new shapes of civilization, created by men who have learned from the past that the savage struggle of man against man is suicidal folly, and that the future must be built on foundations not of mutual harm but of mutual assistance. And then the first truly human stage of man's long agonized history will begin.

"Such, briefly, is the picture presented by *El Torbellino Fuerte*. There is nothing particularly original about the idea; Shelley used it long ago; but Castellano presents his interpretation of it for our own day with startling vividness and reality. What do you think of it?"

The vice-consul reflected. "It's very interesting—but the vision of a poet. Dear old Don Enrique! he has been so

deeply wounded by his generous perception of present evils that he goes too far in his idealism. He believes so thoroughly in his own imaginary picture of a perfect future civilization that he doesn't sufficiently value the many good things that the past has given us. He doesn't see the difficulties involved in sweeping them all away to make place for a new Utopia."

"It is his view, my friend, that we aren't going to have much choice in the matter of sweeping them away. He feels that the future is necessarily conditioned by forces inherent in the present state of things. He feels that the whirlwind is already upon us, and that nothing but the ending of the universe could stop it from running its course."

"Well, I don't know. Things look pretty ominous—but it may not be so bad as that."

"Of course I don't claim that Don Enrique's picture is literally true. But I think I find in it more of symbolic truth than you do. It would seem as though mankind, all over the earth as well as in Mexico, is seething in a furious attempt to break out of its old state of bondage; and meanwhile, all the old forces of material despotism are making their last desperate attempt to clamp the bonds more tightly. But everywhere the individual will is strengthening its power of resistance. Mexico today is an example right under our eyes."

The vice-consul shook his head. "Too visionary. Too visionary."

"Well, I don't mind being called a visionary. I admit that I am enough of a dreamer to stand with Castellano, and to think that I see with him the vision of a world in which eventually no individual will profit from the exploitation

of another's activities. I think that some day every one of us will contribute all his service to the common good, and freely receive in return all the benefits that are required by his needs. And you may call that socialism, if you like; but I call it plain common sense!"

The vice-consul shook his head. "I, too, had such illusions when I was young. But my mature experience has convinced me that men are not like that. You and Castellano impute to humanity a purity of motive which God, in his inscrutable wisdom, has reserved for Heaven only."

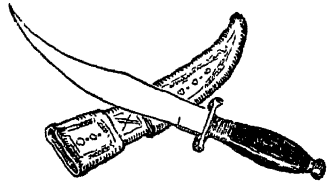
"I told you that you wouldn't like my ideas very much!"

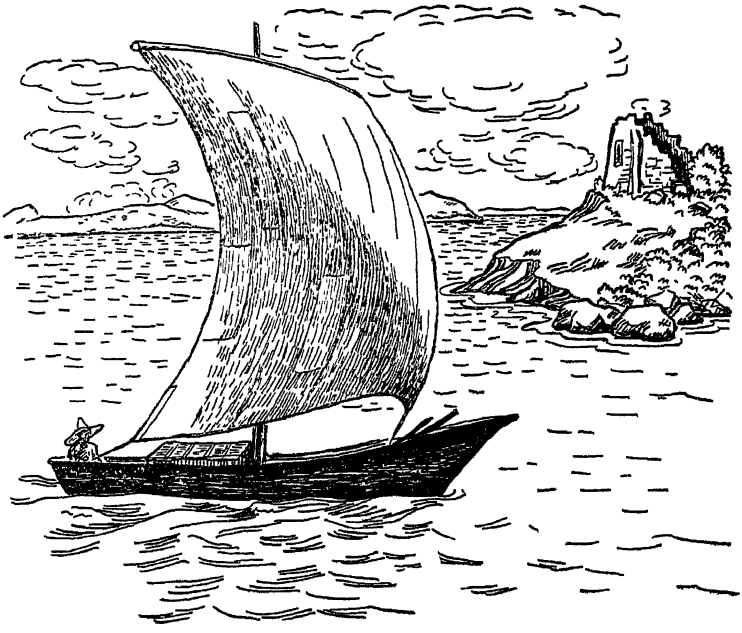
"Well, Mrs. Morton, you guessed perfectly right!"

"Why did we ever talk of this? Nobody ever convinces anybody."

"But may I say one thing more? Aren't you very inconsistent? You live on money you don't earn—it comes to you from factories in various parts of the world where it is produced by other people's labor—and yet you say you think that that's a wrong principle?"

"Of course it's a wrong principle! And of course I'm inconsistent! But I didn't make this system, and I'm a little too old to change it. I have, my friend, only two choices open to me—to be inconsistent, or to be an intellectual hypocrite. I prefer the former."





VI

MRS. MORTON BUYS A FISH

IN THE DAYS AFTER the fantastic discussion with the vice-consul, the actual earth of Mexico seemed more real and intimate beneath Mrs. Morton's feet. For the first time in her life she experienced that specific feeling, known to lords and serfs alike, which is called love of the soil, her own soil.

She put all far-flung thoughts and troubling speculations out of her mind, and turned to the simple earth for occupation. She embarked on one of her occasional periods of

intensive gardening:——not with the finical fine-fingeredness of a whimsy lady, but with the sound vigor of a peasant who loves the touch and smell of the earth.

These spells of primitive enthusiasm always caused Chango to wonder if his eyes were deceiving him——as he saw his sedate mistress, clad in a pair of baggy overalls, a laborer's shirt and an old canvas hat, emerge from the house and stand upon the terrace, poising, with speculative eye, as she surveyed the garden and determined the exact spot upon which to launch her attack.

He was always greatly alarmed by these outbursts of activity. He forgot from one occasion to another that he had ever before witnessed these horticultural doings; and each time he supposed anew that they signified dissatisfaction with his labors as gardener. With troubled heart, he would wonder what he had done so badly that the Señora was now preparing to take over his duties and discharge him into the unfriendliness of the vast outside world. It required all of Clara's motherly tact to restore him to peace and convince his childlike mind that the good Señora's spasmodic gardening enthusiasm implied no censure of his skill, and was quite unrelated to that slow plodding toil of his which, through the days and the years, continued as unvaryingly as the processions of the sun.

Pedro responded differently to the Señora's manual labors. In his secret heart, he was deeply ashamed of them. It was his apprehension that the people in the village might learn of her descending to so common a level of employment and might lose some of their awe of her. But he never dared give any sign of this feeling; and she had no suspicion that she was disturbing his household pride or causing him

to fear for the imperiled social status of the Villa Colima.

Clara, alone, fully and simply understood her delvings in the earth. Sometimes of an afternoon, in the hours of household leisure, Clara would put aside her exquisitely wrought crocheting and come out to the garden, and in gravely smiling silence work a little at Mrs. Morton's side. After an hour of puttering about in the soil or training the vines up over the terrace, she would return silently to her kitchen, clean her hands with great care, and resume her intent needlework. The only times she ever worked in the garden were when Mrs. Morton was there. Even when she was gardening she preserved unaltered her grave demeanor of an exiled princess out of ancient days and her impenetrable mask of mystery.

(2)

One evening after a wholesome afternoon of gardening, Mrs. Morton sat down to dinner with an anticipatory relish that was, she felt, very unladylike if judged by refined Victorian standards. But she did not care a pish and a tosh and a boiled owl. Tonight she was enjoying one of the great luxuries which she sometimes permitted herself—expensive Russian caviare, served on thin slices of bread-and-butter.

Whenever she met anyone who ventured to volunteer the information that caviare was usually served on toast, she would look at that person with quiet disdain. "I am eighty years old; during the last forty years of my life I have eaten caviare whenever I felt I could afford the extravagance; and what I do not know about the proper way to serve caviare is unknown. I was instructed in the matter

by a charming Russian general whom I once knew when I was with my husband in India. Caviare should be eaten on thin bread-and-butter; it should be spread very thick—indeed, it should be heaped rather greedily; and it should be sprinkled with just a touch of minutely chopped Bermuda onion. Bermuda, do you hear? No other kind! And then it must be placed in the icebox for half an hour, so that it becomes thoroughly chilled. My wonderful Chapala cook, Clara, knows how to prepare it perfectly. Here —try a bit!"

And if the visitor were a man, Mrs. Morton would usually tell Pedro to prepare for the gentleman a cocktail to accompany the delicacy. She did not care for alcohol herself.

Tonight she was alone. Slowly and deliberately she nibbled at the delicious salty morsel which Clara had prepared for her so excellently, and looked out across the terrace of her house at the evening sky. It is well, she thought, that toward the inevitable end of one's life and at the close of each particular day, one should indulge in small innocent pleasures. She detested those people who enjoyed themselves by being miserable to no purpose.

Her tranquillity was disturbed by the sound of loud disputing voices from the direction of the kitchen. One voice she recognized—that of Pedro; the other was unfamiliar to her. In a moment she heard the voice of Clara joining excitedly; some kind of acrimonious dispute was going on.

She rang the table-bell. Pedro appeared.

"What is all this noise about, Pedro?"

Pedro looked slightly cross. "It is only a bad-mannered fisherman who came from way down the lake. He wants

to sell you a fish. But he asks too much for it, and Clara will not buy it—although it is a very fine fish. And the man says he will not go away; he says he is going to stay until I let him talk with you and show you his fish. And I tell him he can wait until the dead rise from their graves and God sitting on his throne judges the world. And he says he will wait until then; that he is in no hurry at all. And I tell him I will send Chango to get the soldiers, and they will take him away and shoot him. And he says he does not care; that usually when he meets soldiers he eats them alive—two at a time, if he is hungry. He is a bad-mannered man, a very bad-mannered man. He will not go away."

"Let him wait, then," Mrs. Morton said placidly. "I will see him when I have finished my dinner."

"Yes, Señora." Pedro departed.

Mrs. Morton continued with her meal. When she had finished, she told Pedro that she wished to speak with Clara. Clara came into the dining-room.

"Clara, is this a nice fish?"

"A very fine fish, Señora, firm and clean. The man—a stranger from somewhere down the lake—says it is the finest fish he has ever caught. You know how those fishermen lie! But it is a fine fish. And it is fresh. He says he just caught it today; and I believe that."

"Then why don't you buy it, and let the man go away? It is getting rather late."

"The man is crazy. He asks one peso for his fish. One peso! It would be better if he got himself a gun and became an honest bandit: then people could respect him! But one peso for a fish! He should know that nobody will pay him

a fortune for his fish. He is crazy. He says he will not go away until the Señora herself has told him that she will not buy."

"Very well. Tell him to go around the house and meet me on the terrace. I will look at his fish. But don't bring him through the house; I don't want fish scales strewn all over the living-room. Tell him to go around through the garden."

"Yes, Señora. But the man is crazy. One peso for a fish! One peso for a fish!" Clara shook her head in gloomy prognostication, and departed.

The price was indeed absurd. But Mrs. Morton had her own ideas. This would not be the first time a native had invented a preposterous excuse for getting past the dragon-guard of Clara and Pedro, and coming to her with his private problems. She devoutly hoped it was nothing more than that. She did not want to entertain another fleeing *politico*, another romantic General Gonzales in disguise, with all his comedy and tragedy, his ignominy and his nobility, draped around him in robes of shoddy grandeur.

(3)

She went out onto the terrace to talk with the stranger. She saw at once that this man was no General Gonzales and that his ragged attire, heavy jaw and thick hands were no disguise; they were the man himself. He was a dark-featured quiet-looking man; his face was clouded with that habitual melancholy which distinguishes many of the people in whose veins beats the pulse of pure Indian blood.

He spoke in a low burred voice. His first words startled her.

"I am a wild man," he said, respectfully taking off his straw sombrero.

"You are a *what?*"

"I am a wild man," he repeated tranquilly. "That is what the people of Chapala call those of us who live down the lake, on the Mescala shores near the island of El Presidio."

"Oh, yes." She recalled to her mind the rocky island of El Presidio with its ancient ruined fort, and remembered the legend of how, in the days of the Conquest, it had been besieged for months by the fierce natives while a desperate little group of Spanish invaders held out, against hopeless odds, until they all died of starvation. She knew that the people of that Mescala region had a bad name, to this day. It was reputed to be dangerous for strangers to venture onto those shores. Yet this man had such a sad, gentle face that she could hardly think of him as a formidable savage.

"Well, wild man, let me see your fish."

He went back to the edge of the terrace and returned carrying by the gills a sound-looking excellent fish, silver-colored with ruby shadings around the fins and tail. He caressed the slippery surface with his thick forefinger. "A good fish. A very good fish."

"How much?"

"To you—only one peso, Señora," he said politely in a quiet voice.

"I'm not asking you how much you want for the whole island of El Presidio," she remarked. He did not understand her irony.

"You have said, Señora . . . ?"

"I have said that you ought to have sense enough to know that nobody will pay you a peso for one fish."

The man looked at her with darkly glowing eyes and no smile. "But I need the peso, Señora."

"What for? To go to the *cantina* and get drunk?"

He shook his head. "I must buy some nails and some pitch, to mend my boat. It will not last much longer if I do not mend it. And then I could not catch any more fish. And then I might die. I do not want to die."

She fixed her eyes on him intently and saw that he was speaking the truth. Her heart was moved. So many of these people lived on the dangerous edge of actual starvation; they had no margin of safety; hunger prowled at their very doors. But what could she do to combat such widespread misery? Nothing.

Yet there flashed into her mind the fact that her caviare at dinner tonight had cost more than the price of this fish. Knowing that she was a fool, she rose. "Wait here."

She went into the living-room for a moment, and returned carrying her large black handbag. She groped in it and found a silver peso. She handed the heavy coin to the man. "There," she said. "Now you can take your fish home and eat it yourself. I don't need any fish just now."

"May the Blessed Virgin watch over you forever!" the man said fervently. "Good-night, Señora."

"Wait a minute, wild man," she said. "Sit down there on the top step, and keep your fish off the terrace, and tell me a little about yourself."

She seated herself in a wicker chair and peered down at her caller as he obediently took a seat on the upper step,

dangling his fish by the gills and staring out into the darkness.

"About myself, Señora? There is nothing to tell about myself. I fish. That is all."

"But tell me," she persisted, "aren't you ever afraid to live there way down the lake, with so many other wild men around you?"

"No, Señora, I am not afraid of the wild men; they are just like me. All I am afraid of is the ghosts. There are some very bad ghosts there."

"Indeed? What are they like? Tell me about them."

"Some of them are Spanish ghosts—the ghosts of the first white men who ever came to Chapala—a long long time ago. They are the worst ghosts. My father saw one of them once. He was a tall fierce man; he carried a big sword in one hand and his head in the other hand. The head dripped blood. The head scowled and cried out terrible curses and rolled its eyes. The head was almost bald and had a long white beard, and the eyes had bright blue lights flashing in them. My father ran for his life—and the ghost ran after him. It was night; but luckily the door of the church was not locked, and my father got inside just in time.

"Of course, Señora, the ghost did not dare go inside the church. My father lay down in front of the altar and prayed; and he stayed there until dawn. All night he could hear the ghost walking round and round the church, and he could hear the teeth of the head gnashing. My father said that the sound of those gnashing teeth was the most awful thing he had ever heard in his life. But in the morning the ghost went away. So my father escaped. He was so fright-

ened that he had to go right back to the *cantina*, and he stayed there for three days."

"Hump!" said Mrs. Morton. "A good many ghosts come out of the tequila bottle!"

The man shook his head. "No, Señora," he replied seriously. "That is not where they come from. It is well known that they come from the ancient graves. You see, there are people who cannot rest because of some terrible evil they have done. There is one very bad Indian ghost —a woman. People say she killed her father and her mother because they were old, and could no longer work, and were a trouble for her to take care of. Often people hear her howling at night, and where she has passed there is left behind a smell like a decayed fish. But nobody has ever seen her—only heard her and smelled her."

"But have you never seen a ghost yourself?"

"No, Señora. I carry a charm that protects me." He felt inside the neck of his ragged white shirt and pulled out a small bronze medal that hung on a piece of fishline. "When I was a little boy, my father gave the priest a whole peso, and the priest blessed this before the altar; and it has—you see?—the picture of the Blessed Virgin on it; and now no bad ghosts can come near me. They know that the Blessed Virgin will not let them harm me."

"Then why are you still afraid of ghosts?"

He hesitated. "Well, Señora, how do I know?—the Blessed Virgin has many, many things to attend to—and perhaps she might be busy sometime when a ghost came around—and the ghost might know that, and come after me."

"Oh, I don't think she is ever too busy to look out for

good honest men who believe in her as devoutly as you do."

"You think so, Señora? You think so? That is what the priest says, too. I hope it is so."

"Yes, I am sure you are safe. Tell me, is it very hard work being a fisherman?"

He smiled. "Señora, to be honest—no. I work as many days as I need, in each week, to catch all the fish I can sell in the market place or that my family can eat. Why should I work longer? Should I catch more fish than people will buy? We wild men do not understand the people who live in the towns, and why they work, work, work all the time as if the devil were chasing them. Why did God make the sunlight if not that we should enjoy it quietly, on the beach or in the market place, during many of our days?"

Mrs. Morton smiled. "I see that you are a philosopher."

He did not understand the word, and went on:

"You also, Señora,—you do not work all the time, do you?"

"I am an idle, worthless old woman," she said with a touch of bitterness in her voice. "I sit with folded hands, and other people all over the world have to work for me. It isn't right—but that's the way the world is run at present. However, there was a time when I did my share of the world's work. I bore and brought up and educated four children, and many times I did the cooking and housetending. I was once almost as poor as you are."

"You were poor, Señora?" He stared at her, incredulous.

She wished to change the subject. Her own comparative ease and comfort, in these later years, gave her a sense of

guilt when she was confronted by a person whose daily struggle was with the direst poverty.

"Well, wild man, are you afraid of anything else besides ghosts? Are you afraid of storms? The big storms that come up suddenly when you are out on the lake in your boat?"

"No, Señora, I am not afraid of storms. I know how to handle my boat. My grandfather, who died long ago, taught me when I was a boy. I shall not drown. Is a deer afraid of the hills? Is a gull afraid of the winds?"

"I suppose not."

He peered at her with melancholy eyes, and suddenly startled her with a question. "Are you, Señora, afraid of death?"

She waited a long moment before she replied. She had not anticipated that so profound a question would emerge from so casual a conversation. The question was not an easy one to answer: it involved one's whole life-attitude toward the Mystery of Mysteries.

After reflection, she answered him, with complete sincerity.

"No."

The wild man nodded approvingly. "I did not think you were. If I had thought so, I would not have asked you. You do not look like one who would be afraid of death."

She stared at him, and said nothing. But she felt a little glow of pleasure in hearing that she had produced this impression on him. In her opinion, honesty, kindness and courage were the three greatest human virtues; and she was not sorry to have the most difficult of them attributed to her by this simple heart.

"Many people are afraid of death, Señora," he went on. "But that seems to me foolish. Even if one becomes a ghost, one could try to be a good ghost."

"I should think so," she said.

"It would not be necessary to do wicked things and to smell bad, if one were a ghost. What do you think?"

"I believe you are right."

Then, as she observed something which she had not noticed before, she began looking at him intently.

"What's the matter with your hand?" She was staring at his right thumb, which was swollen to twice its normal size.

"I tore it with a hook, two days ago."

"Come over here to the light. Let me see it. Wait till I get my glasses."

She inspected the hand. She could see instantly that it was badly infected and that it needed immediate attention.

"You sit down!" she said sternly. "Just wait there!"

He obeyed.

She went into the house, climbed the stairs, and went into her bathroom. There on the top shelf of the medicine closet she found a bottle of iodine, a small sharp scalpel and a roll of sterile bandages. She carried them downstairs.

"Now hold out your hand!" she commanded. "And close your eyes!"

With one quick stroke, she plunged the knife-blade into the swollen thumb, and watched with professional satisfaction as a little blood and a large secretion of pus came bursting to the surface. She wiped the nasty mess away, inserted a drainage wick in the incision, poured iodine onto

the thumb, and rapidly bandaged it with thick layers of gauze.

"Does that hurt much now?"

"No, Señora, not as much as it did before. It feels more peaceful."

"I thought so," she said, greatly pleased with herself. "You wait here."

She went into the house, washed her hands carefully with lysol and then with Pear's soap and water, put a touch of eau-de-cologne on her hair, and returned to the man.

"Now, that ought to serve well enough for tonight. But tomorrow you go and see the doctor. You hear me?"

"I? Go to the doctor? But he charges a peso if you go to see him!"

"You are to go to see him three times! You hear me? Three times! You have a bad infection there—and if it is not beginning to clear up by tomorrow, the doctor may want to open it up still further. You are a fool! Do you want to have your arm cut off? Wait a minute!"

She took up her black bag and extracted three silver pesos.

"There!" she said. "Now, you go to the doctor three times. If you don't I'll have you arrested as a swindler."

The wild man nodded respectfully and stared at his neatly-bandaged thumb with pride. "Yes, Señora. Yes, Señora. But I would rather use the money for my boy."

"What's the matter with your boy?"

"My boy is crazy. Something is the matter with his head. He thinks he wants to be a doctor. A doctor!"

"But how can he be a doctor without studying many many years?"

"He cannot. That is why I say he is crazy."

"How old is he?"

"Fourteen years, Señora."

"Has he been to school?"

"For a while, Señora. But now no more."

"Why not? Why not?"

"I have no money to buy him shoes and clothes. I can sell so few fish."

"But the law forces you to send a child to school, doesn't it?"

The man grinned. "The soldiers usually leave us wild men alone. They do not like to come so far down the lake. Certainly not to mix up in our private affairs and to try to make us do with our children things that are impossible."

Mrs. Morton frowned. She thoroughly approved of the modern Mexican laws that made school attendance compulsory, perceiving in that step a great hope for the advancement of the entire land. Yet she saw the point of view of the wild man. She did not know what to say.

After a moment she made her decision. She groped in her black bag, rustled some papers, and finally extracted a bank note of twenty pesos.

"There! Buy that boy some clothes!" she said angrily. "And you send him to school now! You hear me? You hear me?"

The man looked at the twenty-peso note in silence. He took it from her hand and put it carefully into his trousers' pocket. Then he turned away from Mrs. Morton, walked slowly to the edge of the terrace, and knelt down.

Holding up his hands toward the night sky, with head thrown back and uplifted face, he began to pray in a low chanting voice. She could see his white bandaged thumb sticking up in the darkness, a grotesque object against the twinkling stars.

Mrs. Morton turned away. She was aware that no human eye should spy upon the wild man at this moment.

When he had finished praying, he came back to her. "My boy shall start school tomorrow, Señora. May the blessing of the Holy God be upon you forever."

Some obscure emotion was tearing her to bits. "Wait!" she said imperiously.

She walked into the living-room, sat down at her desk, and wrote a name and address on a piece of paper. "Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, Avenida Santa Veracruz 27, Guadalajara, Jalisco." Then she took two more silver pesos from her bag and returned to the terrace.

"There!" she said. "Now, wild man—some day before long, you take those two pesos and use them to go to Guadalajara on the bus, with your boy. You go to this address, to the great man—the poet—Señor Castellano. He is my dear friend. You tell him all about your boy. He will know how to advise you, so that your boy can learn to be a doctor. He is a very kind man; and though he is poor himself, he has many rich friends who entrust large sums of money to him for good uses. Several times in the past he has been able to help nice boys whose ambition it was to become good doctors. Doctors are needed in Mexico."

The wild man took the sheet of paper and the two pesos, and stowed them away carefully in his pocket. He put on his straw sombrero, and then took it off again. Then he put

it on again, and took it off again. Then, holding his sombrero in one hand—the bandaged one—and the fish in his other hand, he departed in trance-like silence.

Mrs. Morton sat down in a comfortable chair on her terrace facing the stars and thought gloomy thoughts. How terrible life was for the poor! How little could any individual do about it! How little of honest intention did any government have of doing anything about it! How cruel was Nature to its miserable creatures! She was bitterly glad that she did not believe in a God: it would be the last touch of unbearable agony if one thought that all these miseries were the result of a calculated plan ordained by Divinity.

She heard quiet footsteps approaching through the lighted living-room. It was Clara.

"Señora, that queer man is gone now."

"Yes, I know, Clara."

"So you bought his fish!"

"Why, no—I got to talking with him, and I forgot all about the fish!"

Clara looked at her reproachfully. "But, Señora, you did buy it—for he handed the fish to me as he left, and said that he hoped you would enjoy it!"

She was confused, now that she was caught in a lie. She had supposed that the wild man would do as she had told him to, and carry the fish away with him for his own use. There were some of her follies that she desired to conceal even from her dear, good Clara. This was one of them.

"Oh, indeed! Well, perhaps I did buy it. I am getting old, Clara, and I do not always remember things."

Clara gave her a shrewd and slightly amused look, but

said nothing except, "Good-night, then, Señora," and departed to her own quarters.

Mrs. Morton was glad that Clara had asked no further questions. She thought to herself: "I gave him one peso and then three pesos and then twenty pesos and then two pesos. I have paid twenty-six pesos for a fish—probably the most expensive fish in the whole world. I shall have to economize on caviare for a while to make up for my folly."

(4)

Next morning before luncheon, Clara came into the living-room with that expression of simulated grief on her face which, as Mrs. Morton knew from experience, indicated that Clara had wonderful gossip to tell.

"Señora, I have sad news for you."

"All right, Clara. What?"

"It is about your wild man."

"Yes?" Mrs. Morton knew that Clara loved to hold her audience in suspense, and that there was no use in trying to hurry her.

"Yes, Señora. He got into difficulties last night after he left here."

"Ah?"

"Yes, Señora. The stories of what happened are not very clear. Nobody seems to agree with anybody else as to how it all came about. Some people say he got drunk at the *cantina* and started a fight. Other people say two bandits who were at the *cantina* tried to take some money away from him. Other people say he was just sitting quietly in a cor-

ner when the fight started and that he tried to go away. I do not know what the real truth is."

"Yes, I see. And what happened?"

"Oh, something very bad!"

"Has he been arrested? Bring me my stick! I shall get him out of jail at once!"

Clara arose to her full height of dramatic triumph. "No, Señora, he is not in jail. He is dead!"

"What?"

"Yes, Señora. Everybody in the *cantina* got to fighting —they broke tables and chairs, and the lights were smashed out, and it must have been terrible—and when the soldiers at last came, there was nobody there except your wild man—and he was lying on the floor, with a knife-stab through his heart—and blood, blood, blood!"

Mrs. Morton felt slightly sick. What had she done? Had she given this simple man so much money that he got dizzy with riches and met his death in a drunken brawl? Had he foolishly displayed his new-found wealth among the rough characters who always infest a *cantina*, and invited the attack of professional bandits? Had he been an innocent bystander, doomed by the lightning-like vagaries of fate? What had really happened?

She did not know. She could never know. She was not sure that she wanted to know.

"What was his name, Clara?"

"Nobody has any idea, Señora."

"Where did he live?"

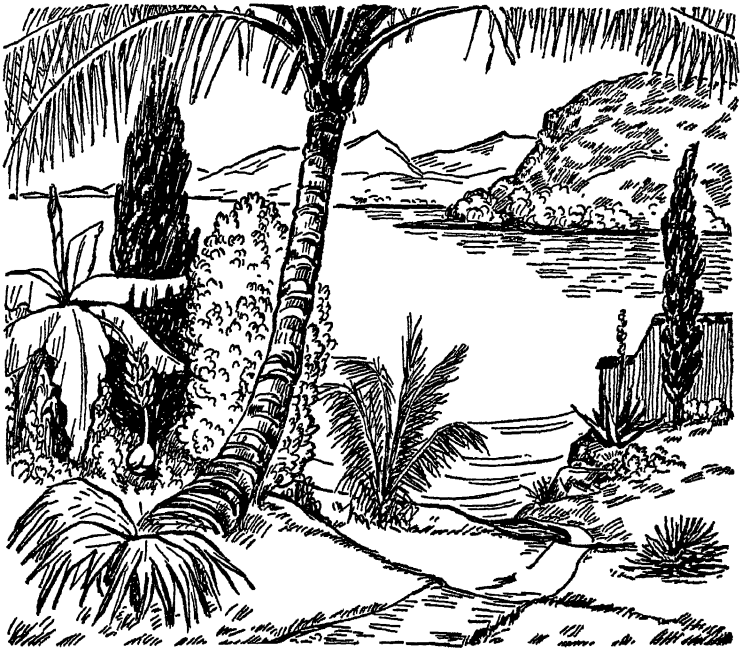
"Somewhere down the lake. Nobody knows where."

"He told me that he had a boy who wanted to be a doctor. How could I find out where that boy is?"

Clara shook her head. "I do not think you could find out, Señora. This lake is vast, with many small villages on its shores; and there are many small boys in Mexico."

"Thank you, Clara."

Mrs. Morton closed her tired eyes. When Clara was gone, she looked out again at the tranquil and beautiful lake, luminous in the noon sunlight. "I must keep my mind on this impersonal beauty," she thought. "The human race does not bear thinking about."



VII

THE PORTRAIT OF MRS. MORTON

No TRACE WAS ever found of the family of the dead wild man. Though Mrs. Morton set on foot inquiries among the fishermen, the peasants, and the soldiers whose duties took them into that Mescala region of the lake, no information came back. Nobody cared. The ancient mountains whose unchanging slopes stood sentinel around this lake seemed no more imbued with fatalism than did the living creatures whose precarious sails moved to and fro on the water.

In the quietude of her days, Mrs. Morton turned for a

while from her passionate gardening, and set herself the adventurous task of rereading a number of books which she had not opened for years. There on the shelves of her living-room stood row after row of dignified old sets—Thackeray and Scott and Dickens, Carlyle and Macaulay and Ruskin, Spenser and Pope and Shakespeare. Returning to them now, she found that most of them seemed a little time-faded and outmoded. To her surprise she discovered that Alexander Pope's ramparts of polished steel showed the dust of the years less than did many of these writers. As to Shakespeare, she found that what she had always heard was perfectly true—that age cannot wither nor custom stale his glowing magnificence. With all the fresh enthusiasm of her girlhood, and with a much intensified power of comprehending certain deep still waters, she revisited his magic world of lights and shadows, comedy and tragedy, vulgarities which only at her present age she could find really entertaining, and sublimities which no enrichment of years could ever enable her fully to admeasure.

Her actual days and nights thus moved in even procession through grey corridors where beautiful and terrible and fantastic figures of imagination kept up a carnival dance that began to become slightly dizzying to her. She felt almost as if she were no part of any real world. A veil as of glass seemed to be interposed between her and the sound of her own voice.

"Is this the characteristic psychology of old age?" she thought. "Is it thus that the spirit gradually prepares itself for the eventual obliteration? The day of vigorous action is gone; the day of hopeful illusion is gone: are the keen

moments of self-realization and the soul's awareness of its own peculiar unity—are they gone also?

"I do not know," she said aloud. "But it is not unpleasant, anyway! And whether I myself am real or not, at least the lake is real. There is no doubt about that."

She sat there on the terrace, with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on her lap and with the great expanse of Lake Chapala stretching away at her feet. Why did one always think of it as a very large lake, though it was only sixty or eighty miles long and fifteen wide at its widest—and why did one love it with an intensely personal feeling, just as if it were a very small and private lake of one's own?

Perhaps because it had the intense reality of a dream-lake: because it comprised so much mysterious variety of shore, with pointed mountains, harsh cliffs, sloping plains and rounded hills; because of its hidden little villages and its small rocky islands, its wide sea-like expanses and its narrow reedy inlets, its acre-broad drifting masses of water-hyacinths and its square-rigged fishing boats with prows high and sharp as a blackbird's beak; because of its golden days of sun and its grey days of rain, its blue noonday skies and its black-and-starry midnight dome. Perhaps it was symbolic to the heart of all possible aspects of wonder that the word *lake* awakens in the deep imagination, touching the nerves of affection even more than those of awe, and bringing an echo of home rather than a warning of alienage.

She was accustomed to priding herself on her common sense rather than on any gift of high imaginative powers. Yet all that was romantic in her seemed quickened into a

secret alertness by this lake's mysterious placidity. It had always been so, since the first hour when she saw it.

She remembered clear transparent dawns of pink and aquamarine-blue over this lake; and sometimes the sunsets were like volcanoes of smoky flame. On certain misty grey days, the farther shore would seem as remote as if the lake were ocean-wide; and on other days when the sunshine was sharp and the air like crystal, the grey mountains across the water seemed almost to approach to the sill of your window, and it was as if you could touch them with your outstretched hand. Quiet dark-eyed fishermen sailed over these waters; their returning boats were outlined against the western gold, and at night their nets, hung on poles along the beach, were turned by the moonlight to spider-webs of silver. Sometimes vast winds would sweep over this lake, rolling tremendous breakers high up onto the shores; and then the storm would suddenly subside into a calm twilight.

And this landscape had also its ghostly aspect, like some scene on an alien planet: it was possible in certain moods to feel that there might come a day when the mountains would grow weary of struggling with the tidal attraction of the moon, and the globe of the earth would falter in its orbit, and as earthquakes rode howling over and under the land, this lake would slip sideways like a sea gull and bring eternal peace to many sad-eyed men. In such hours, the ancient Aztec Lords of Tlalocan, those myth-born elemental gods of earth and sky, could almost be seen riding the great western clouds in chariots of fire.

Today the lake lay smooth and clear before her. The blue-grey mountains of the farther shore were streaked

with pale gold. A few long dark boats of the fishermen moved through the quiet afternoon; and wide masses of the *lirios*, the water-hyacinths, drifted slowly along in the currents of the water like floating meadows of green and pale purple bloom.

(2)

Pedro came out onto the terrace. "A letter for you, Señora."

She smiled at him. "How do you know it's for me, Pedro? Perhaps it's for you."

She loved to tease him a little from time to time. She was well aware that he could not read or write, and that he had never received a letter in his whole life; and his pretences to literacy always amused her. "How do you know it's for me?"

"It is for you, Señora! It says so on the envelope." He spoke confidently. "It says: 'Señora Seymour Morton, Villa Colima, Chapala, Near Guadalajara, Jalisco.' "

She laughed—this time at herself. Undoubtedly Pedro had got the postman to read him just what inscription the envelope bore. She took the letter from him.

"Yes, you are quite right," she said, glancing at it. "Thank you, Pedro. Maybe it will be a nice letter."

"May the Blessed God grant that it be so, Señora!"

She was already aware that it would be a nice letter. The handwriting on the envelope was the firm wilful honest script of her married daughter Nora.

Mrs. Morton disapproved of Nora, and was fond of her in spite of her nonsense. In the category of "Nora's nonsense" she numbered her daughter's many odd friends in

Mexico City,— all kinds of queer communists and archeologists and artists and other eccentric persons. But she had to admit that Nora seemed to be an almost perfect wife and a very gifted painter—and that she was a delightful daughter.

She tore open the envelope. It was a long letter. Nora wrote:

"Dear Mother: I am sending to you, with a note of introduction, one of the oddest old birds in the world. I know he will amuse you. He is Professor Arzici—but what he is professor of, God alone knows.

"For many years he has been one of the most famous of all the queer characters here in Mexico City. Most people consider him completely crazy and a bore—but I don't: I think he is an eccentric but gifted man, and an interesting talker. Your own pet genius, Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, quite agrees with me.

"The Professor is a combination of scientist and painter; he has invented incomprehensible theories of what he calls 'curvilinear perspective' and 'the circle of distance' and 'weighted colors.' According to the last of these theories, all colors have different emotional weights: red is the heaviest and green is the lightest, and if a painting is to have proper balance and proportion, the colors must be so distributed that the right half of the picture weighs, in color-values, exactly as much as the left half. It all sounds very mad—yet I must admit that old Professor Arzici gets some remarkably fine effects in his paintings. My friend Diego Rivera does not like his work; he says it is lacking in 'social consciousness.' Well, of course Diego is

a great painter—nobody disputes that nowadays—but that doesn't necessarily mean that he knows everything.

"This funny old Arzici lives in a vast ruinous palace built three centuries ago, which now stands in the midst of the crowded slums. Once it must have been a mansion of splendor, where the Spanish grandees stalked in the light of a thousand torches and their haughty ladies made eyes at their secret lovers. But not today. In the whole of the enormous building there is no practicable furniture except Professor Arzici's iron bed, a plain kitchen table and three straight-backed chairs. But as for the junk!—you never saw such a place! It looks like the lumber-room of an old-fashioned Wagnerian opera house; there is everything there that you can think of; it would not surprise me if you could find even a stuffed swan and a papier-mâché dragon; I know there is an anvil, for I have seen it. And besides there are endless piles of magnificent bits of old Spanish furniture, and stacks of half-finished paintings, and work benches crowded with bottles of chemicals where Professor Arzici has been experimenting on a new kind of pigment which he is going to give to the world. And I am not joking when I say that there are literally hundreds, maybe thousands, of portfolios of his sketches—each sketch being, for him, the germ of a masterpiece.

"The cooking in this incredible mansion is done by his only servant, an old hag, on an open fire that burns on a layer of bricks and earth placed in the middle of the former ballroom. The smoke floats in clouds overhead. The whole place is a series of great staircases and empty reception rooms and deserted corridors—a place of cobwebs and dust and ghosts. It is a Piranesi nightmare.

"Sometimes he goes away for several months at a time; retires into the southern jungles and lives like a wild man as he prowls around the base of the enormous volcano Orizaba. He paints the various aspects of the mountain, at dusk and at dawn, in sunlight and in storm—clear as a knife-blade on certain days, on others veiled in cloudy lightnings. Some of the pictures he has done are—well, I won't say what they are: but they frighten you a little, and they are something you don't forget.

"I regard his work quite seriously; and since I am one of the few people who do, he has taken a great liking to me. He is such an old dear! He told me not long ago that nothing except his high esteem and respect for my husband kept him from eloping with me. Though he is only about eighty years of age, and ugly as a goat, he seemed to think there was nothing unlikely in this fantasy.

"He says he has no first name: he signs all his pictures 'Prof. Arzici.' I have been told that this is not his real name at all, and that 'Arzici' is a Mayan or Toltec word that means 'Terrible Mountain of Fire.' But he has called himself Professor Arzici for forty years, and nobody seems to mind.

"He is utterly harmless, and though people laugh at him a great deal, everybody rather likes him. He is one of the notable sights of the city, with his long snow-white beard, vast shining bald head, gleaming little eyes and huge meerschaum pipe. He dresses in pure white, with a flaming red tie that is as big as a sash, and he wears a white sombrero. Crowds turn around to watch him as he passes along the street. The government ought to pay him a pension, just because of the amusement which the sight of his extraordi-

nary figure gives to the American tourists. Sometimes he will stop at a street corner and make an address to the bewildered passers on the subject of 'curvilinear perspective' or the geometry of rain storms or the transubstantiation of the soul. He has confided to me that he is certain that when he dies his soul is to be transformed into the soul of the great mountain Orizaba.

"I trust that this picture I have given you of him does not frighten you—for he is coming to see you! I have talked to him a great deal about you, and your poet-friend Castellano apparently has done the same; and when recently old Arzici came to call on me I showed him a photograph of you. He was enchanted. He wanted to start right off, and take a train that night, and go to visit you. He is determined to paint your portrait; he says your face expresses certain qualities which he must get down in a picture. I persuaded him to wait a day or two, so that I would have a chance to give you warning and explain to you who and what he is. But any day now you may expect to see his extraordinary figure walking into your garden—unless he takes it into his head to climb over the wall!

"Now, don't blame me, Mother!—you are always accusing me of doing absurd things—but this wasn't my doing; it was entirely his own idea. And anyhow, I think you are going to have an amusing time with him; you yourself are far crazier than you realize. And I certainly hope you will consent to pose for him. Don't imagine for a moment he will want to sell you the picture: he is much more likely to present you with twenty or thirty of his works if he likes you. Don't hesitate to accept a gift from him if it is anything you want; he seems to have an independent in-

come from some mysterious source, and he scorns the idea of making money out of his art.

"I shall be eager to hear how you get on with him, my dear."

Mrs. Morton put down the letter, and her wrinkled face broke into a smile. So she was to have the honor of entertaining a mad painter, was she? Very good! No form of kindly eccentricity repelled her: she enjoyed watching even the queerest animals in the human zoo. And what a nice girl that wilful Nora of hers was! Nora knew perfectly well that her mother would delight in a visit from this erratic genius!

(3)

Two days later, as she was sitting on the terrace overlooking the garden and continuing her twentieth perusal of *The Tempest*, Pedro came out to her with his little tray. He was trying to keep his face straight, but he succeeded very badly. On the tray was an engraved card that was twice the size of an ordinary calling card. Mrs. Morton took it up and read

PROFESSOR ARZICI

MEXICO

"I think he wants to sell something," Pedro said. "He is loaded down with a whole burro-load of sticks and canvas and bags and all sorts of things. When I asked him what he wanted, he said: 'Never mind, little boy: you run along and give my card to your mistress—lest I grow interested in your queer face and translate it into immortality!'" Pedro giggled.

"That's all right: I will see him."

Professor Arzici entered from the hall, shuffled through the living-room and out across the terrace to Mrs. Morton, and bowed low and ceremoniously. He was indeed encumbered. On his back was strapped an easel, several heavy paint-smeared canvas bags hung from his shoulders, and in his hands he carried a large palette, a bundle of brushes, a tin box and some paint rags.

"How do you do, Professor Arzici? My daughter wrote me of your coming. I am glad to see you."

He looked at her intently with his bright, piercing eyes. After a moment he said:

"Yes, just as I thought! This is indeed the face . . . Ah yes! my picture is already completed in my mind . . . Señora—shall we begin?"

She was amused by his impetuosity. "Why, yes, if you like. But you look hot and tired after your walk from the village. Don't you want to sit down for a moment and let me give you a cup of tea?"

"That would be delightful! That would be delightful! How kind you are, Señora." He divested himself of his burdens, one by one, and mopped his brow with a huge red silk handkerchief. He peered about at the lake, the sky, the garden and her, with a restless hunger of curiosity.

"Do sit down, Professor Arzici, in that comfortable chair, while we have tea."

She sent for tea, and began to observe her guest. He was all that her daughter had described, and more. His vast dome of a forehead seemed as big as a mountain slope; and behind the forehead, the top of the cranium rose up in another enormous bump, like mountain beyond mountain.

His old eyes were shrewd, animated and full of expressive feeling. His long white beard was discolored around the lips by the stain of tobacco smoke. His flaming red tie was almost as big as an ordinary shawl. His whole bearing was vibrant with an energy such as she had rarely seen in so old a man. The aspect of his face was ferocious—and yet it was also calm, like the outlines of volcanic lava when they have cooled into a timeless tranquillity.

He sipped his tea, and beamed on her.

"I knew, Señora, that your place of residence would be like this," he began. "I saw it quite clearly in vision last night on the train. There is a propriety ruling the universe —there is a harmonic principle governing all things— which would make it necessary that such a face should have such a garden. If this garden did not already exist, the Powers would have been obliged by their own inner necessity to create it. Such is the Law of Conditioned Origination. I have discovered that Law, and all my painting is merely the demonstration of it."

"I am glad you like the garden, Professor Arzici. In all the years I have lived here since my husband's death, I have never tired of it. It is my daily delight."

"Precisely. Precisely. The face creates the garden: the garden creates the face. Each force in this world, as it operates, is itself modified by that on which it operates. To use a violent example—when we say that a stroke of lightning has destroyed a tree, we speak inadequately; for it is equally true to say that the tree had destroyed the stroke of lightning. When we say that the rain has given life to the fields, we should add that the fields give life to the rain."

His eyes gleamed with the intensity of inner feeling as

he disclosed these mystical thoughts. Mrs. Morton did not understand precisely what he meant; but he was certainly an animated old fellow to listen to.

"I fear I shall have to hear your views at greater length before I shall be able to grasp them completely," she said. "But they sound interesting. You see, Professor Arzici, I discovered at about the age of thirty that I did not know everything: since then, I have been a sparrow, picking up crumbs of knowledge from under the tables of the rich."

He laughed an enormous laugh. "Ah, how well you put it, Señora! Ah, recognizably the master-spirit! Only the great eagle, lord of the air, can at will take on the humility of the sparrow. That is the final test of human character . . . I should like to teach you to paint. You would paint well."

He was beaming at her as if in a dream.

She said: "Well, Professor, as to the thing you have come here for—I understand from my daughter that you want to paint my portrait?"

At once he came to life. "If I may have the honor! It was for that sole purpose that I came all the way from Mexico City, on that foul train which is one of the curses of our corrupt and confused modern civilization. Until trains are abolished, the spirit of man will remain in a state of insane coma."

She did not agree with his pessimistic view of the benefits of modern invention; so she merely went on: "Yes, I shall be glad to pose for you. Do you want to paint me in the dress I am wearing at present, or would you prefer something else?"

He at once forgot the problems of civilization, and became intent on scrutinizing her very carefully.

"Señora, while I greatly admire your present costume, may I ask whether you perchance have a gown of a blue that is not too dark a blue?"

Mrs. Morton reflected. "Yes, I think I have something of the kind you mean. Wait a moment: I will show you."

She went upstairs to her closet and found the old dress she had in mind. It was, just as she had remembered it, a simply cut garment of severe outline, the color of the cornflower. She carried it downstairs—smiling the while as she remembered that in her youth in rustic England nothing was regarded as a more shocking offence against refined taste than to let a man see any female garment that was not actually being worn.

He was in raptures over the color. "Ah, Señora! Perfect! Superb! Sublimely calculated to strike just that note of indeterminate existence between Being and Non-being that will enable the dominant note, the actual likeness, to emerge as a dynamic, not a static thing! Here again is the Law of Conditioned Origination! It was obligatory, from the very nature of the Universe, that precisely this gown exist!"

"Good! Now, where do you want to paint me?"

"Why not just where you were sitting a moment ago, Señora—if that is agreeable to you?"

"Very well. You can be setting up your easel while I change to this other gown. I shall not be long." She started to go.

"One moment, gracious Señora! I must request that in preparing yourself for the portrait you do not put on any jewels, such as diamonds, pearls, rubies, or the like: they

would not be compatible with the picture as I see it." He hesitated a moment, and then added: "And no rouge or lipstick, please."

"You need not worry, Professor: I have no diamonds, pearls, rubies, or the like. As for rouge and lip-smears, I never use them. And further, you need have no fear that I shall enamel my finger nails red or purple!"

She departed, much pleased with her last shot at him.

She smiled to herself as she changed her dress. This was going to be rather good fun. He was a phenomenon, if there ever was one. Crazy as a loon, doubtless; but by no means a charlatan, as she had feared might be the case. His sincerity was burning all over him. She was a little excited by the prospect of having him paint her portrait: it was like going on an unknown journey, or seeing the emergence from the void of a planet which yesterday had no existence.

When she had changed to the cornflower blue gown and looked at her demure figure in the mirror, she came downstairs again and went out onto the terrace.

Professor Arzici had already set up his easel and a large canvas. He had taken off his coat and his red tie, opened the collar of his shirt, and rolled up his sleeves to the elbows of his strong arms. His vast gleaming dome of a head was even more striking now than before. He was busied in squeezing long worm-like gobs of paint from lead tubes onto his palette. His mind was in a frowning dream of concentration: he seemed hardly aware that she was present.

She seated herself.

"Is this all right?"

He looked at her for a long time.

"Permit me, Señora."

He walked across the terrace to her, pulled the folds of her skirt into more freely hanging lines, adjusted her right hand a trifle where it rested on the arm of the chair, and then stepped back.

"Please raise your chin just a little . . . No, it was better the other way . . . Yes, that is perfect . . . Now relax completely; be comfortable . . . That is right! Now we are off! . . . Oh, Professor Arzici! I call upon your soul and upon the soul of the great Orizaba Mountain for aid!"

Then the expression of his face changed into perfect calm: lifting his brush in a gesture like that of an orchestra conductor taking command of his nervous musicians, he began to paint . . .

He began to paint, with large, confident sweeps of the brush. He made no preliminary charcoal outlines, but at once attacked the canvas with his pigments. He would stop at times to glare at her for a long moment: then he was working furiously at the canvas again. Though the day was cool and a pleasant breeze was blowing across the terrace from the lake, beads of excited sweat stood out on his bald forehead. His concentration was prodigious—indeed like that of a conductor who is carrying the whole of a vast orchestral score in his memory while he weaves the utterance of each separate instrument into a combination of patterns that will express his total will.

Mrs. Morton's own personal feeling was remote from this spiritual turmoil which she was witnessing. She sat there quietly and comfortably, looking out at the blue lake and the far-off grey mountains. She was not a fidgety or nervous person, and remaining still was no trial for her. In fact, she was finding this to be a very pleasant way of spending

a nice summer afternoon and an agreeable break in the monotony of her quiet life.

Some quality of gold in the sunlight brought back to her mind a summer day in the English countryside of her girlhood, and she smiled to herself as her thoughts dwelt on the recollection of those tranquil and far-off years. All of those dear people were dead now—her father, gentlest of men and simplest-hearted of clergymen—her gracious mother who so loved the writings of Ruskin—her two older sisters: all of them gone now. She thought of them not with sadness or grief, but rather with a sense of the rich completeness of the innocent lives they had led and the tranquil deaths they had died.

They had never even seen her present world, this curious Mexican world that had become hers by adoption. If they, her kindred, were still moving through the quietude of their rustic English land, would she feel homesick, she wondered? She thought not. Always she had been slightly remote from any real world, always a stranger at heart. She had been a competent ironic actor but never a real participant—always holding the world at arm's length from her in a gesture of secret isolation. Even such inescapably real events as the act of giving birth to her children had not, with all its savage pain, touched that hidden kernel of Being —herself . . . Were all people like that? Or was she an unnatural freak? Or what?. . . Were all people lonely?. . .

She was aroused from her musings by the voice of Professor Arzici. "Señora, I note by my watch that you have been posing for an hour, though it has seemed to me only a few seconds. Please rest now: get up and stroll about for a few moments. You will become tired if you hold the pose

too long. But you will be glad to know that, in a sense, the picture is already finished. I have discovered what I was seeking. It will take me only three days to put in the details that will give my concept its formal aesthetic expression."

She rose, stretched herself, and was about to cross the terrace to the Professor and look at the start he had made. He held up a forbidding hand. "I beg you, gracious Señora, not to take so much as a glimpse of the portrait until it is completed. I might not be able to go on if you did so. Even the most courteous interposition of another mind would be likely to break the continuity of my Conditioned Origination. And I dare take no chances—for the Spirit of the tremendous Orizaba has been with me, and this is to be one of my most notable paintings."

"Very good, Professor Arzici. Only one thing I want to request of you—don't flatter me! Don't make me look younger and prettier than I am. You see, it has taken me a long time to put these wrinkles into my face, and they came there honorably, and I don't want them left out."

Professor Arzici bowed. "Not a wrinkle shall be omitted!" he promised solemnly, and went on with his painting.

After a short rest, she resumed her pose.

"The chin a little higher, please. The right hand a little more relaxed. That is good." He painted on.

After a while he began to talk as he painted. "The great Chinese painters of the Sung Dynasty never used a model: they studied their subject until it became a part of the very fiber of their brains, and then re-created its essence from memory. It may be that their theory was correct. Yet I do not know: it is possible that such a technique is not suitable

for us who are of European blood. I have found that I myself require the slight stimulation of some visible object before me as I paint: the mind alone is not enough."

"It seems reasonable," she said.

"Yet perhaps we ought to transcend reason. Perhaps we ought to do without material aids and rely solely on the imagination. Its powers, combined with the powers of memory, are limitless. But I regretfully confess that I myself require some starting-point—just as an expert diver requires a springboard from which to leap if he is to execute a particularly notable swan-dive."

Mrs. Morton could scarcely refrain from laughter as there came into her mind the imaginary picture of Professor Arzici, with his great bald head and white beard, poising on a springboard high above the water and about to execute a particularly notable swan-dive. But she managed to control herself.

She asked him: "I think you spoke of yourself as a European? You were not born in Mexico?"

"I was born, as one of your most fascinating English poets, Señor Santayana, says of himself—

'I was born where first the rills of Tagus
Turn to the westward.'

Do you know the other passage:

'Thence I might watch the vessel-bearing waters
Beat the slow pulses of the life eternal,
Bringing of nature's universal travail
Infinite echoes;

'And there at even I might stand and listen
To thrum of distant lutes and dying voices

Chanting the ditty an Arabian captive
Sang to Darius.

'So would I dream awhile, and ease a little
The soul long stifled and the straitened spirit,
Tasting new pleasures in a far-off country
Sacred to beauty.'

"Ah, Señora, how well and with what subtle music he expresses an impossible dream, a universal nostalgia!"

"No, I do not know that passage: I am glad you told it to me. Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, also, greatly admires Mr. Santayana's poetry."

"Ah, Don Enrique! The noble, the beautiful, the severe, the charming Don Enrique! The chaste, the perfect, the eloquent, the generous Don Enrique! I love him as a brother!—a younger brother, of course; he knows everything about poetry, but he has much to learn about painting."

"Tell me some more of yourself," Mrs. Morton said. "What was your ancestry? My own was yeoman English —not exciting, but sound. Tell me of yours."

"Señora—my father was Spanish, my mother was German. To few people would I confide this—but he had the blood of Cervantes in his veins: she, that of Goethe. At least I have been told so—and I will defend that faith at the point of the dueling pistol if any man dares question the fact!"

He was painting prodigiously now; his own flow of eloquence seemed to intoxicate his painting hand, which never paused for an instant as he was speaking. His palette had become a battlefield of paints, where the most improbable hues met in what seemed to Mrs. Morton a chaos that could

never integrate itself into a form. But apparently it was not a chaos to his eyes: he worked on, steadily, confidently.

At length she said: "May I rest again? I find I am getting a little tired."

"Most gracious Señora! Certainly!" He glanced toward the sun, which was now beginning to sink below the tops of the mango-trees in the garden. "Yes, it is getting late. We have done enough for today. We will stop. Ah, how I regret the treachery of our mortal sun! I could go on painting for twenty-four more hours: I grow in strength with each brush-stroke."

He put down his palette and brushes, and turned to look at the garden, the vast lake and the blue mountains.

"Beautiful! Beautiful! Ah, Señora—do you realize that some ladies go rushing about continually from one spot on this spinning planet to another spot on this spinning planet —go rushing about in those detestable motorcars—while you sit here, washing your soul in the mystery of Creation?"

"Well, maybe they like it," she replied. She had never in all her life tried to change the ways of the world on a large scale; and she had steadfastly refused to join any of the organizations whose purpose was to convert the heathen, or abolish alcohol, or stop bullfighting in Mexico, or preserve the purity of English speech. "Perhaps they like it," she repeated. "And I don't think you can reform anybody, anyway. Every once in a while I try—and the results are usually catastrophic."

Professor Arzici peered at her. "Of course, you are right. It is not your business, nor mine . . . Now, Señora, have

you some closet or some unused room where I may stow away my painting materials until tomorrow?"

She showed him where to put them. He was careful in carrying his canvas to keep its face turned away from her.

"Now," she said, "won't you stay and have dinner with me? I don't dine until seven-thirty, so I will go and rest a little while; but you can sit here and read for the next hour. And would you like a whiskey-and-soda?"

"Thank you, Señora—but I never touch that unpleasant Scotch invention which is not a beverage, but a necessary drug for persons inhaling the raw mists of the Highlands. As to your kind invitation to dinner, I am happy to accept it. But I would prefer first to return to my hotel and remove the paint and turpentine from my person; and I shall return at seven-thirty exactly."

He bowed ceremoniously and strode out. She went upstairs. There from her window she watched him as he paused at the gate, filled his huge meerschaum pipe with tobacco, lighted it, and walked away puffing clouds of smoke into the tranquil air of Chapala.

"A real volcano! Orizaba indeed!" she thought. She was having a very amusing time with this odd creature.

(4)

When Professor Arzici returned, Mrs. Morton found his company at dinner extremely pleasant. She noted with approval that he ate with fine appetite and drank a goodly portion of the bottle of sound Burgundy which she had provided for him.

After dinner, when they went into the living-room, she

called his attention to her most prized possession, the great silver and amethyst cross which General Gonzales had presented to her.

Professor Arzici took down the cross and examined it with careful scrutiny. Then he put it back onto its pedestal.

"I am sorry to say that I do not care for it."

She was surprised. "Why not? It is an authentic old piece, isn't it?"

"Unquestionably. Indeed, nothing finer of its kind exists. Of course, I recognize it: I am not so ignorant as to be unaware that this is the famous amethyst cross which was presented in the year 1529 to the first Bishop of Mexico by the King of Spain—and which was stolen by General Hernando Gonzales from the National Museum on January eleventh of last year. A remarkable object. You are not afraid to keep it?"

"No," she said. She looked at him severely: it was not her intention to discuss with anybody, ever again, her decision to keep the great amethyst cross.

"You are not afraid?... Nor would I be!... To the great eagles of the air, all is permissible! ... But we will go on now to more important considerations than those of personal possession! The reason why I do not like the cross is as follows: the theory is wrong. No design based on the rectilinear system can achieve perfection. It is not possible to create a satisfactory work of art with the aid of rectilinear principles. Nothing in Nature is straight: everything is curved. From the great globe of the earth itself down to the tiniest drop of water, all objects partake more or less of the principle of the circle. Nature does not employ either the straight line or the wheel: both are unfortunate

inventions of man. If man had not invented the straight line, out of the more wicked part of his nature, the loathsome skyscrapers of New York could never have been built, and rifles and artillery could never have been constructed."

"There is something quite charming," she said, "in the thought of an army rifle shaped like a half-circle, that would shoot its user accurately in the pit of the stomach. Why don't you invent that?"

He disregarded her frivolous interruption. "And the wheel—if man had not invented that, out of even more poisonous depths of his spiritual ignominy, there would be no traffic, no machines, no modern social degradation. The straight line and the wheel come directly from Hell.

"Curvilinear Perspective," he went on, "which I have invented, will doubtless change the present situation. All perspectives must be based on parabolic or hyperbolic or ellipsoidic or variable curves—not circles or straight lines—if human life is to be in harmony with Nature. Nature contains no straight lines and no mathematically perfect circles."

Mrs. Morton began to object. Suddenly she had a bright idea on which to base her objection. "But Professor Arzici, how about the straight lines of a rock crystal? Surely those are perfectly straight lines—and they are in Nature. You can't deny that!"

"Ah, my dear lady! With your customary penetration of intellect, you have at once hit upon the one apparent exception in Nature to my Law of Curvilinear Space! But the exception is only apparent, not real. You see, the angular meeting-point of the planes of the crystal is subject to in-

conceivable internal strains. I have calculated that the internal molecular pressure must be about nine and a half billion tons per square centimeter—a pressure compared with which the pressure released by an explosion of dynamite would be the mere caress of a baby's hand. This static pressure produces a curvature of the straight lines of the crystal. Our human instruments of precision are not delicate enough to measure or even to detect this curvature—but it is there. Indeed, the strain is so intense that the curve is probably bent back upon itself, in a fourth-dimensional manner that is a contradiction of all human experience—being at one and the same time both concave and convex, as though an object were simultaneously to the right of us and to the left of us. The matter, though not susceptible of physical demonstration, is readily perceptible to the imaginative faculties."

"Really!" she said. There was no downing this old fellow.

"Yes, such are the mysterious facts. When I was younger, and was utterly ignorant and understood nothing of importance—and so was, naturally, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Salamanca in Spain—at that time I did not grasp this idea. But now it seems very obvious."

"Oh, so that is what you are professor of!"

"Far from it! I have conferred my title on myself: I do not derive it merely from the University of Salamanca. I am 'Professor of the Theory and Practice of Curvilinear Perspective.' I conferred the title on myself after three days of fasting and meditation at the foot of Orizaba. And when you see my paintings, you will grant the justice of my claim

to the title. All my pictures employ a perspective that is a series of concentric or interlocking parabolas so that the design is held together in a firm geometric pattern that is little less solid and organic and alive than the structure of the universe itself."

She could not understand a word of this, and tried to turn his thoughts to more concrete topics.

"You speak of Orizaba. I understand you have painted a great deal around the base of that volcano."

His face lighted up. "Ah, that majestic mountain! The most imposing and awe-inspiring peak on the face of the planet! Yes, I try to take several months in each year for a period of painting in that rich tropical region. The forests there are jungles, the streams are liquid crystal, the nightingales sing all night long like insane angels.

"I go to the town of Orizaba, buy me a small patient burro, pack my painting materials and some food into several stout canvas bags, and load them onto my little four-footed friend. Then I put on a ragged shirt and a pair of old trousers, and set out into the wild mountains. Sometimes I do not see a living soul for weeks at a time; I forget that there is such a thing as the human race; my whole consciousness is of the intense greenness of leaves, the surprising lavender and yellow and nacre of orchids, the flame-red of lilies—and butterflies and birds and chameleons that are moving eidolons of light. Even the stones of the brooks are like solidifications of pure fire. I do not paint these things; I merely live among them until I have become a part of them and feel worthy to turn my thoughts away from them and toward the objective of my pilgrimage—which is of course the great Orizaba itself. Then I forget the thousand

finite beauties of the jungle and am aware of nothing except the one infinite beauty of the volcano itself.

"Some days I paint Orizaba from dawn to dusk; on other days, I do not touch a brush, but merely contemplate some aspect of the mighty mountain until it becomes a part of me and I become a part of it. In all my paintings I try to depict not the physical but the spiritual reality of the mountain. Once in a while I come to a little village, and stay a day or two with the natives, and replenish my food supply. But mostly I live alone with the Spirit of the Mountain."

Mrs. Morton asked: "I have heard that the natives of that region are almost unchanged since the days of the Conquest, and that they are very unfriendly to strangers?"

"Yes, they murder most strangers. But they are not unfriendly to me." He laughed. "They regard me as completely manic—and therefore I am in their eyes a being sacred to the old pre-christian gods. They believe that the Mountain would vomit flame and destroy them if they harmed a hair of my head. So I get on beautifully with them."

In the course of the evening, she showed him her daughter Nora's grave Madonna-like portrait of Clara the cook.

"I like it very much," he said meditatively after examining it for several minutes. "Your daughter is a very gifted painter. She is a little prosaic in her approach to the universe—but she is a very fine woman."

"A little impulsive and eccentric, don't you think?"

"Not enough so! Not enough so! And it shows in her painting. She is too empirical; she is content to accept facts as if a fact were deserving of more respect than an idea. This portrait of hers suffers from the defects and limitations

that are inevitable in every portrait that is done in the Empirical Formula."

"What is the Empirical Formula?"

"It is the method that has been used by all the portrait painters of the past—that of the depiction of an observed physical reality. At its best it can result in a mere likeness —as we see in Titian and Rembrandt. Of course your English portrait painters are beneath contempt: Gainsborough and Reynolds should have earned a more honest living by being plowboys instead of toadying to the vanity of the aristocracy. But even for serious painters, such as the sublime Pieter Bruegel, the path has been difficult—until I discovered, by chance, the secret of the Subliminal Formula."

"Could you tell me anything about this Formula?" She was a little annoyed by his remarks about the immortal Sir Joshua, but she concealed the fact.

"No, Señora, not in a few words. But when you see my portrait of yourself, where I am applying the Subliminal Formula in its full rigor, you will be able to judge of its efficacy."

He beamed upon her. "You will then know that you have not been wasting your time in idle prattle with an old idiot." He chuckled. "In Mexico City, some people call me 'the Crazy Old Mountain that Smokes!'—Have I your permission to light my pipe?"

"Certainly. Why didn't you do so earlier? I like the smell of a pipe."

Presently he announced that he must go. She shook hands with him cordially, and he went lumbering out into the night. But he got only as far as the gate; then he came hur-

rying back. "Oh Señora, I forgot to mention that if you do any reading between now and the time of my return, it should be poetry,—not newspapers, magazines, or works of reference. The perusal of any kind of prose would create the wrong mental vibrations." Then he departed.

Was he a bit unbalanced or wasn't he? she wondered as she went to bed. At any rate, she was enjoying the episode. To use the phrases she had heard American tourists use, he might be a "nut," but he wasn't a "bad egg."

Nevertheless, to assert to herself her right to a little remaining independence of thought and action, she deliberately disobeyed his orders and read the *Illustrated London News* for a quarter of an hour before she went to sleep. She didn't think that this act of rebellion could hurt his picture much, and she herself got the delicious emotional relief that a schoolboy gets by sticking out his tongue at the back of his unsuspecting master.

(5)

Next day Professor Arzici came in brisk, sparkling-eyed, full of the energy of a creative artist or a madman—she did not know which. He set up his easel and began at once to paint.

"It does not matter much today," he said, "whether you pose continuously or not. Today I shall be occupied chiefly with abstract problems of design that have little to do with the likeness. Attend to your gardening; do whatever you will; but come back once in a while and relax in that chair for a few moments. That is all I require today. Tomorrow I shall be more exacting."

She did as he instructed her to do, and spent little time in posing. At the end of the morning, she invited him to take luncheon with her. He declined courteously, saying that he never ate at noon, and continued with his painting.

When evening came and he was putting away his painting materials, she invited him to stay again for dinner. He declined, in simple terms:

"Señora, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to repeat the delightful experience of last night. But I must consider my duty to my picture. I am already beginning to burn up my very soul in anticipation of the problems that will confront me tomorrow, and in the glory of facing them; and I must go to my room now and take a simple supper of bread and cheese and beer, and sleep. Tomorrow comes the crisis."

"I am sorry you cannot stay—but I understand."

When he returned on the third day, he was as exacting as he had foretold. He fussed about the way the folds of her dress were affected by the wind—about the posture of her head—about the vile commercial paints he was obliged to use. She saw that he was in a state of high nervous tension, and she was very gentle in her replies to his remarks. He worked on, furiously—refusing to pause for luncheon. She could see that he was becoming almost exhausted by the strain of his effort.

The afternoon passed on toward its close. Sunset was not far away; she noted that it would be upon them within half an hour, and then he could paint no more. She was glad, for she felt it might be dangerous for him to continue this prodigious effort much longer.

Suddenly his face glowed with an inner light. He stepped

back, and for a long moment stared at his picture. Then he said:

"Señora, your portrait is finished, and it is my masterpiece. I hereby have the honor of asking you to accept it as a gift and a token of my esteem. Wait until I sign it; then at last you may look at it."

He signed it, and put down his palette and brushes. She, rather weary herself, went forward to look at the portrait.

She had been prepared for any horror of distortion or flattery of her face—but not for the surprise of what she saw now. She was shocked by an astonishment that was like a physical blow as she took her first glance at the picture.

It was not a portrait at all; it was not the representation of a face or a figure: it was the painting of a landscape.

It was a picture of the green countryside of the England that she had known in her youth. In the foreground was a meadow bounded by trim hedges, and beyond that a winding country road. Then came clumps of trees—majestic oaks and chestnuts—surrounding and almost hiding a small cottage of ancient stone. And beyond that rose the hills, ascending in gentle slopes over which she had walked so many times in the loneliness and mystery of her girlhood. And far away on the horizon towered a vague blue mountain that was wholly a mystery. Had that mountain actually been there in her youth—and had she failed to see it? Or had she seen it—and now forgotten it? Or had it never been there?

Her astonishment gave way to the feeling that this was an extremely beautiful picture. It was a living landscape—a perfect representation of the land of her first twenty

years. It was charged with the vague and deep emotion of those years, with peace and wonder and summer lights—a tranquil land, wholly different from this volcanic Mexico. She had an uncomfortable feeling of violated privacy as she realized how much this stranger knew about her and her homeland.

Suddenly her emotions shifted into indignation:

"So that is what you call my portrait, is it?"

He smiled. "Yes!"

"So I've been wasting my time, posing here, while you merely painted a landscape out of your imagination?"

"No, Señora, you have not been wasting your time. I could not have done it without the inspiration of your face."

There was a tone of sincerity and of suppressed emotion in his voice that made her anger fade away.

"Yes, I understand," she said. She did not understand in the least—but she was aware that the exalted beauty of the picture made it a thing about which one should not bicker. "Have you been much in England?"

"I studied at Cambridge in my youth. During the Long Vacations I used to walk all over England. Does the picture please you?"

"Yes, it is very beautiful," she said wearily. "Very beautiful."

"And now that it is finished," Professor Arzici said as he lighted his pipe, "may I have your permission to come tomorrow, and for the next three days paint a picture of your garden?"

"Certainly. I shall be honored to have you do so," she said perfunctorily.

He departed, perfectly happy, puffing his pipe. She went to bed, perfectly miserable. She felt that in spite of the beauty of the picture she had been made a fool of by this madman. Well, it served her right. And it was all Nora's fault. And she should have known from the start that Nora was a little unbalanced, and that Arzici was completely so.

(6)

She scarcely saw him during the next three days. He came in and out through the gateway like a ghost intent upon his own prowlings. She smelled his pipe often. Once she heard a shout from the garden, and looked out of her window to see the descendant of Cervantes and of Goethe dancing around his easel like a little boy. She was disgusted, and turned away.

At the end of the third day, he came up onto the terrace where she was reading. He was carrying his canvas. He spoke to her very gravely.

"Señora, my picture of your garden is finished. Would you care to see it?"

"Certainly, Professor Arzici. I hope you have had a nice time doing it."

"I have!"

He shifted to his right hand the canvas which he had been holding behind his back, and put it down on the chair before her so that it faced her.

She stared at it, astonished.

The painting had nothing whatsoever to do with her garden. It was a full-sized portrait of herself.

There she sat in the picture, a quiet dark figure against

a background of golden clouds. The face was composed, thoughtful, alive with an internal life—looking out into infinity with a faint smile hovering on the lips, the smile of one who in the twilight of old age is remembering happy things of the noonday. Her hands were folded in her lap; they were strong, old hands, expressive in some magical way of perfect peace.

She realized very quickly that this was more than a picture: it was an interpretation and a hymn. It was a celebration of the dignity of old age and of the tragic human spirit, whose dealings with the flesh are so difficult but whose ultimate downfall is not always ignoble or ignominious.

She tried to recall her face in youth: all she could remember was its smooth blank innocence, devoid of any strong marks of personality. A changed image confronted her here. She looked at it impersonally and keenly, as if it were not her own. There was gentleness in this strange face, and the expression of a powerful will. The cloud-white hair framed a forehead that was greyly wrinkled with lines of fatigue, but under the straight black eyebrows the blue eyes kindled with a spark of living light. The high-arched nose, the firm lips, the lean corded throat, were aged but not repellent. Time, like a genius-smitten sculptor, had carved out of the blurred anonymity of a girl's smile the sharp weathered contours that now were symbols of the indwelling spirit. Though the flowerlike curves of Spring were gone, the granite lines of Autumn remained; and they were heroic ones.

She grew dizzy with the sense of her own eighty-year-old beauty: she forgot herself as she looked at the picture, and lost herself in the intricacy of its implications. Tears

came into her eyes. Was she indeed like this? Was this grave compassionate face indeed her own? Had the long erosion of the years actually moulded the blank lineaments of her girlhood into so noble-looking a person? Did light still shine out of her eyes?

Arzici had kept his promise not to omit one wrinkle: this was unmistakably the portrait of a woman of eighty. Yet if it were true that she really looked like this, she was a finer person than she had supposed herself to be, and her long effort to achieve spiritual strength and purgation had not failed . . .

Professor Arzici was watching her intently. When she turned to him, she saw that his eyes blazed with joy as he noted the expression on her face.

"Ah!" he said, "so the crazy old fool Professor Arzici is beginning to learn how to paint, is he!"

He came across the terrace to her, bent low, and kissed her hand. She was weeping.

In a moment she recovered her composure. "Thank you, Professor Arzici," she said.

"Thank *you*, gracious Señora!" he said, and took out his meerschaum pipe.

They sat down in silence. He relaxed completely, and began to puff vast clouds of smoke into the air. He was, for the moment, content. And so was she. A great event had happened in both their lives: he had achieved a masterpiece, and she had received a revivifying impression of her own spiritual integrity.

Presently he arose, and turned the canvas so that she could see it a little more clearly. He bowed. "Permit me,

Señora, to have the honor of presenting to you my picture of your garden!"

"I thank you." She could say nothing more.

They sat for a long time in silence. At last Mrs. Morton's mood changed, and she felt the need of breaking the emotional tension.

"So that's the way you paint, is it? Always painting what is around the corner? You old cheater!"

He smiled. "Yes. That is the Subliminal Formula. The far is the near, the unreal is the real, the invisible is the visible."

She laughed. "And the utmost lunacy is the height of sanity?"

"Precisely!" said Professor Arzici, puffing at his pipe. "I could not have expressed the matter better myself."

After a little while, he gathered up his painting materials, loaded himself down with them, gravely shook hands with Mrs. Morton, and departed.

The fragrance of his pipe lingered in the still air after he was gone.

VIII

THE HOLY PAINTING OF JOCOTEPEC

In due time, the two paintings of Professor Arzici were provided with dull gold frames which Mrs. Morton's daughter selected for them in Mexico City, and were installed in the living-room. The landscape hung on the east wall, the portrait on the west. They looked extraordinarily handsome there. As she grew more familiar with them, her liking for them grew still deeper. Both of them seemed to move with imperceptible authority into niches of her life that had been awaiting their arrival.

The portrait exhibited a dignity of composition and a richness of human life that would make it notable even to eyes that had never seen the model. To her friends it had a double interest. Señor Castellano, on each of the occasions of his visits, grew renewedly enthusiastic over it, both as a work of art and as an interpretation of his old friend's personality.

The landscape was to Mrs. Morton herself an almost more valued possession. She never tired of its depths of tranquil perspective and the far summery light that haunted its horizon.

She possessed only one other work of art of any importance: that was the painting which her daughter Nora had executed for her, and which now hung on the north wall of the living-room. It was a full-sized portrait of the beautiful sad-faced Clara; it represented her seated in placid repose during her rest-hours of the afternoon. She wore a simple white linen dress with a lilac scarf thrown over her shoulders and a dark orange apron around her waist. The brown hands, delicate and strong and unhurried, were busy with a piece of fine crochet-work. In the downcast abstracted eyes the painter had surprisingly captured all the dignity and remote sorrow that made Clara's face so Madonna-like. As a background appeared a mass of green tropical foliage and a few brilliant spikes of flowers. It was a simple, restful and somewhat mysterious picture, Mrs. Morton thought—even if her own prosaic daughter did happen to be the artist.

Yes, it was a beautiful picture. She looked at it for a moment as she stood before it, and then turned to the bookshelves. She took down a volume of Ruskin. In her far-

away girlhood in England, her excellent father had taught her that the writings of young Mr. Ruskin were an infallible Bible on the subject of art. And though nowadays Nora informed her that "Ruskin is a stuffy pretentious old ass who wrote nothing but tripe," she declined to renounce her ancient loyalty. Today she meant to concentrate her mind on him for a quiet hour or two before tea-time.

She was reclining in an easy chair with the book on her lap when Pedro came out to her.

"Señora, there is a man here who wants you to buy a painting."

"What, another painting? What kind of painting? Who is he?"

"I do not know him, Señora. He says he is from Jocotepec."

Mrs. Morton knew that Jocotepec was the small town at the extreme westerly end of Lake Chapala—one of those isolated villages around the shore of the lake where an unchanging native life went on, with its daily trafficking in the market place, its primitive industries and home manufactures, its weddings and funerals and its saints' days and fiestas—a humble town separated completely from the outside world of modernity by the barrier of the mountains and the expanse of the lake.

She had never been there, though she had often wondered curiously what the place was like. It had a local reputation for its fine hand-woven blankets. There existed a rough road from Jocotepec to Chapala, down which the natives sometimes brought their wares on burros or on man-back. They could also come down the lake in their small sharp-prowed boats. But no matter how they came, it

was a large undertaking, and not often attempted except on special market-days. Even on such occasions, boats did not always venture forth from Jocotepec; for Lake Chapala was subject to sudden storms, when the waters became like those of the sea; and the weatherwise villagers preferred to forego the pleasures and profits of the market rather than incur the random wrath of the Lords of Tlalocan when it was hurled upon the waves.

"He came from Jocotepec?" Mrs. Morton said. "That is a long way: that is beyond Ajijic and beyond San Juan Casala, isn't it?"

"Yes, Señora. He says he started at dawn."

"I will see him."

Presently Pedro brought in a tall thin man of fifty whose sunken eyes and lantern jaws gave him the look of a very sick man. Many of the natives looked like this; the greasy unwholesome food of the region—ground corn and lard and stinging chili—produced an undernourishment that left them a prey to every possible stomach ailment.

Mrs. Morton greeted the man pleasantly.

"Pedro says you have a painting you want to sell me?"

He fidgeted with his straw sombrero and shifted his sandaled feet. "Yes, Señora. It is a very wonderful painting —hundreds of years old."

"How did you get it?"

"Long ago my father got it, when there was fighting and a church was burned by the soldiers. Someone carried the painting out of the church to save it. And my father took the painting to his house, and kept it safe. He never saw the man again. And the priest was killed in the fighting. So my father kept the painting in his house; he did not know to

whom he should give it. So we have had it ever since. And I thought that perhaps you would buy it and keep it safe ——and I am sick and shall not live very long. Would you buy it?"

She looked attentively at the man; she was unable to make out exactly what kind of person he was. But he seemed to her to be an honest man.

"Well, perhaps I might buy the picture. Let me see it."

"Oh, Señora, I could not bring it with me! It is too large. Even when it is rolled up, as it is now, I could not carry it all this way."

"What is the subject of the picture?"

"It is the most wonderful picture of the Crucifixion of Our Lord that was ever seen! There is the Blessed Savior Himself, right there on the Cross! It is a picture that makes you kneel down and pray, even if you are not in a church!"

"How much do you want for it?"

"I ought to ask much more——but I would take ninety pesos for it."

She reflected. His asking price was only about six pounds in English money or about thirty dollars in American——a very small sum if the painting were at all good. And there was a bare possibility that it might be very good. She knew that fine old Spanish paintings sometimes turned up in these remote villages. A genuine Murillo was said to have been discovered recently in a town near Guadalajara; and it was an established fact that on the whitewashed wall of the little chapel at Tsintsuntsan near Lake Patzcuaro there hung a magnificent *Entombment* by Titian, once presented to the church by the King of Spain.

"But how shall I see this painting?" she asked.

"The Señora could hire one of the small motor boats here at Chapala, and make the beautiful trip down the lake to Jocotepec, and look at it in my house."

The idea at once struck a spark in her imagination. It had been several years since she had been out on the lake —not since that day when Nora had wished to make some sketches of the Island of El Presidio, and she had yielded to Nora's persuasion and gone out in a boat, and the two of them had had a picnic luncheon amid the stony ruins of the ancient Spanish fort on the island. It had been very pleasant, she recalled. And these little motor boats that were for hire by the day were not expensive. Instantly she decided to go to Jocotepec and to make a picnic of the expedition, and take all the servants, and give everybody a pleasant outing.

She said to the man from Jocotepec: "Very well. I will come the day after tomorrow. You will have the picture all ready to show me, won't you? But don't get your hopes too high: I will buy the picture if I like it, but not otherwise."

"Surely, Señora, surely, Señora! Many thanks, Señora, many thanks." He bowed several times, and turned away with a hopeful expression on his yellow emaciated face.

She watched his melancholy figure disappear. She knew already that she was going to buy the picture, whether she liked it or not.

"Pedro," she said when he returned after taking the man out to the gate, "as soon as you have brought me my tea, I wish you would go down to the pier in front of the Widow Sánchez' hotel and see if you can hire a motor launch for day after tomorrow. Don't get that very small one: I know

it's new and that the others are old, but we would be crowded in the little one. You see, we will take a picnic luncheon, and start at ten o'clock; and you and Clara and Chango are to come, too. And tell Clara that she may bring her old mother if she likes. And you make sure yourself that Chango has washed and dressed himself decently before he starts. And bring some beer for the boatmen. We shall have a nice time, all of us! And of course, bring your wife and your little boy."

"It would be better not, Señora. My wife is afraid of the lake and she cries all the time from the first moment she sets foot in a boat. And my little boy gets sick the minute he gets into a boat, and stays sick all the time."

"Then perhaps it would be pleasanter for them if they did not come."

"Much, Señora."

(2)

The day of the picnic opened with the beauty of an unfolding flower. The world seemed to be a pattern of translucent enamels of blue and green and gold.

Mrs. Morton was in high spirits as she stood on the terrace and saw the wide expanse of the lake rippled by sunshiny breezes. She had eaten her breakfast of toast, a boiled egg and coffee with fine relish; and now she was prepared for adventure. Her eighty years were as nothing to her; they had fallen from her shoulders like an outworn cloak; now she sniffed the fresh cool air, aware of the beauty of the world, and looked forward to the explorations of the day.

It was ten o'clock. Watching from the terrace, she saw a

motor boat leave the village pier, come slowly up the lake, and stop at the stone steps that led down from her garden to the water. The boat was not a handsome affair; it was an old shabby craft with a panting two-cylinder gasoline engine that seemed to require continual coaxing from the two boatmen. For a moment Mrs. Morton hesitated, wondering whether it was sensible to risk one's life on this floating junk-heap. But it looked comfortable enough while it still floated, and there was sufficient room in it for many more people than the seven who were actually to embark.

She walked down through the garden, came to the landing-place, and stepped briskly into the stern of the boat. Some old but fairly comfortable cushions were spread about on the seats. Pedro followed her, carrying an enormous basket that gave out the clank of dishes. The sound indicated that Clara had prepared a rather handsome cold luncheon to be eaten on their way up the lake.

Clara, clad as usual in fresh linen, helped her old black-clad mother, Annunciata, to climb into the boat. The aged mother was smiling and shrugging her shoulders in humble astonishment. During all her ninety years, she had never before been in a motor boat. Clara led her carefully to a bench in the fore part of the craft, wrapped a shawl comfortably around her, and sat down beside her. The mother reached out her fragile fingers for Clara's firm strong hand, and looked about smiling.

Pedro's wife and child came down through the garden to watch the great scene of the embarkation. Mrs. Morton waved her hand to them. She did not like Pedro's wife very much; the girl was a dull-faced wench of twenty-five who probably did not know the difference between Pedro and

any other male creature. The boy was an attractive bright-eyed little fellow who looked like Pedro. He shouted lustily to Mrs. Morton, and she threw a kiss to him.

Chango was the last to join the party. He came running down the path, glistening in the glory of a fresh white shirt and trousers; and his usually dirty feet and hands had obviously been scrubbed to the point of agony.

He was carrying his customary spade. Pedro shouted to him: "Jackass! Father of all the jackasses in Chapala! Don't bring your spade! Are you planning to dig a hole in the water?" Sheepishly Chango hid his spade under a bush beside the garden-path and jumped on board the launch.

"Why, Chango, how nice and clean you look!" Mrs. Morton said.

Chango smiled his foolish smile and wriggled his bare feet in embarrassed pride.

"I took him down to the lake and sat on the shore, while with my own eyes I made sure that he scrubbed himself all over, twice, with Clara's floor brush and lye soap," Pedro explained.

"That's good. Now we can start."

Pedro spoke a word to the two ragged men who ran the launch. They nodded, and settled down on their haunches beside the little cockpit of the engine. One began to spin the heavy flywheel while the other fiddled with the spark and the throttle. There was no immediate response from the machine. The two men shook their heads, conferred in mutters, and began to tinker with connecting wires whose use Mrs. Morton did not understand. Nothing happened.

She took advantage of the delay. "Oh, Pedro, while we are waiting, run back to the kitchen and get your guitar.

Perhaps it would be nice to have some music on the way up, or tonight when we come back—especially if we are a little late and there is moonlight."

Pedro smiled in anticipation, dashed up to the house, and came back with his gleaming instrument. Just as he returned, the laboring boatmen got a feeble wheeze out of the engine. "He will go now, I think," one of the two said to Mrs. Morton.

"Does it often behave like this?"

"Oh, he is good engine. But pretty old. Sometimes you have to coax him a little—like an old burro who is tired."

"Well, let's get started now! We are late! I should think you would check over your engine and make everything right before you take people out on trips like this."

"No use to check over. Who can tell in advance, Señora, if something will happen? If it happens, it happens."

She recognized the fatalism that was a deep current in this dark Indian blood, and made no reply.

They were off at last. Mrs. Morton waved her hand to Pedro's wife and child, and then settled herself comfortably in the stern of the launch, where the seats were supplied with long cushions. Clara and her old mother sat on the bare wooden seats in the bow ahead of the engine. The old woman was chattering like a squirrel and giving Clara's hand enthusiastic squeezes. Mrs. Morton had Pedro take one of the cushions up to them; and the aged woman beamed on her, bobbed her head respectfully up and down, and called out: "Oh, Señora, God and these old bones of mine thank you!"

Pedro, after casting a glance about to see that the important luncheon basket was stowed in a safe place, gave

Chango a playful kick in the rear and made an upward motion with his thumb. Chango grinned and seized one of the stanchions that supported the flat wooden roof of the launch; with the agility of his namesake the monkey he clambered up out of sight. Pedro handed the guitar up to him, and climbed up the stanchion after him.

There on the wooden platform they stretched out lazily in the sun.

"The Señora will not mind if you take off your shirt up here, Chango."

"But it might blow overboard, Pedro—and then what would the Señora say to me?"

"No, it won't. Give it to me. I'll take care of it."

Chango obeyed. Pedro stripped off his own jacket and shirt, and folded all the garments together in a compact bundle.

"Here, Chango—I offer you one of my cigarettes."

"Pedro, I love you like a brother!"

They lighted their cigarettes and lounged on the canvas-covered deck—two relaxed bronze torsos puffing swirls of smoke up toward the blue sky.

After a while Chango asked: "Pedro, is it up there that God is?" He motioned upward with his stubby thumb.

"Yes, of course."

"But the priest says that he is everywhere."

"Well, isn't up there a part of everywhere?"

Chango remained silent with perplexed brows. He could not follow the profundity of Pedro's facile metaphysics.

Pedro took up his guitar, tuned the strings, and began to play. In a moment both men were singing *La Cucaracha*

with as much enthusiasm as if this were the first time that the tune had ever been heard on earth.

Mrs. Morton, seated comfortably in the stern of the boat, heard the music and smiled. She was contemplating the slowly passing panorama of the lake and its rapidly-changing shores. Ahead and to the left lay the wide expanse of water, bounded by the angular shapes of far grey mountains. On the right, the near shore was at first a series of gardens and small villas like her own Villa Colima. Then as the launch moved smoothly onward, the gardens gave way to sloping grey fields wherein stood a few straw-thatched huts of peasants; and behind them rose sparsely covered hills seamed with watercourses. Then came a region where the plainland was crowded out of existence as the hills advanced to the edge of the lake, and there rose up cliffs and scarred ravines that were fantastic with gnarled trees and bright spots of tropical vegetation. Headland after headland succeeded one another in changing hues of red, grey, lavender and orange—alive with color like moving figures in a fiesta-day procession.

In the bow of the boat Clara and the aged Annunciata were chatting busily as they pointed out to each other various objects along the shore. "How different everything looks when seen from the water!" Clara exclaimed. Mrs. Morton smiled and nodded. The two boatmen had relaxed into a motionless lethargy beside their throbbing engine. Pedro and Chango on the roof continued to sing romantic songs to the accompaniment of the guitar.

Everybody appeared to be happy, Mrs. Morton thought; and she was happy too. Even though the painting which she was going to see should prove to be a disappointment,

she felt that the expedition was a triumphant success. She stretched out her hand lazily beyond the shadow of the canopy to feel upon her wrist the delicious warmth of the sun. "Perhaps the secret of happiness is to enjoy small innocent things and to do no evil," she thought . . . "And to forget certain large and inescapable facts," she added to herself as she looked unsentimentally at the swollen purple veins on the back of her lean hand. She was eighty years old, and knew it, and faced the necessary implications without self-deception or laments.

(3)

Shortly after the high-riding sun had passed its zenith, Pedro ended his boisterous guitar playing, put on his shirt and jacket, and climbed down from the roof of the launch. The moment he reached the lower deck, he was no longer a troubadour of the air but an attentive houseboy of the earth.

He pointed out to Mrs. Morton a low spit of land on which stood several old willow trees.

"That would be a good place to stop and tie up the boat while we have luncheon, if the Señora pleases."

"It looks like a very pleasant spot, Pedro."

Pedro spoke to the boatmen; they emerged from their lethargy and obediently swung the little craft in the direction of the promontory. In a few moments the bottom of the boat was scraping against the sandy bottom of the beach. One of the boatmen rolled up his white trousers to the thigh, leaped into the water, and carried ashore a mooring line which he made fast to one of the willow trees. Then

he returned, tossed a small anchor overboard, and looked about hungrily.

Pedro was busy opening and studying his big luncheon basket. After deliberation he produced from it four nicely browned cold chickens, two dozen hard-boiled eggs, four loaves of bread, a foot-high pile of tortillas, a package of red chilis, two dozen bananas, a large slab of domestic cheese, some cakes and a small secret package.

He brought the secret package at once to Mrs. Morton. "Señora—those pigs do not know what this is, and would not like it if they knew. I brought it just for you. Will you eat it?"

"I will, Pedro." She knew what it was—and with great pleasure ate her two thin caviare sandwiches.

When she had finished he brought her a thin slice of chicken with lettuce and a bit of buttered bread and a glass of iced tea. They looked very attractive to her.

"Now, that is all I want, Pedro! You hear me? You settle down now, and eat. And see to it that the boatmen get enough to eat."

"Yes, Señora. They will not starve: trust them!"

She looked down at them. The obvious relish with which they were devouring their food touched a nerve of guilt in her brain. She had never gone actually hungry in the course of her whole life. These men had.

"Pedro—didn't you bring some beer for you all?"

"Yes, Señora." He produced half a dozen bottles of good Moctezuma beer from the basket and distributed them.

While Mrs. Morton slowly ate her own luncheon and relished it, she watched Chango from time to time. He was enjoying his luncheon even more than she was enjoying

hers. He seemed speechless with pleasure. He ate half of one of the large loaves of bread, five legs and half a breast and two backs of chickens, five eggs, half a pound of cheese, many tortillas, and three raw chilis of which one small taste would suffice to make an ordinary person believe that he had swallowed a red-hot poker. He drank a bottle of beer, childishly shaking the bottle and licking off the foam that rose in the neck. He asked for more chicken and another bottle of beer; but Pedro told him he could not have them. So he consoled himself with the three pieces of cake which Pedro allotted to him, and with five bananas. Even the boatmen seemed to be impressed by the spectacle. Since there were two eggs left over, Chango ate them too, to finish off with, and then played a tune by blowing into his empty beer bottle. Then he bet one of the boatmen five centavos that he could take a whole chili into his mouth, chew it up, and swallow it. He won his bet. The boatman reluctantly produced the five coppers; Pedro took them away from Chango and stowed them in his own pocket for safekeeping.

When the repast was ended, the two boatmen rose, touched their hats respectfully to Mrs. Morton, and thanked her for the delicious feast. "What nice people!" she thought to herself. "So much more gracious in their expression of things than we Anglo-Saxons are."

But during the next half-hour she would gladly have exchanged a little of the Mexican politeness for an equal quantity of Anglo-Saxon efficiency.

One of the boatmen leaped ashore again, undid the tie-rope from the tree, pulled up the anchor, and resumed his place in the boat. Again the two men spun the flywheel

and jiggled with the carburetor and the spark. Nothing happened. They struggled on.

Pedro and Chango stood by, giving advice to the laboring and sweating boatmen. They received only muttered curses in reply. Over and over again the two toilers tried the same devices that had failed to work a dozen times before. Mrs. Morton grew impatient as she watched them; why didn't the idiots try something different? Obviously the thing they were doing now was producing no result. But she did not interfere; she was completely ignorant of even the names of the various organs of that mysterious machine called a gasoline engine.

At last the boatmen decided on a new form of attack. They opened a locker, extracted a can of gasoline, and began to prime the engine. They spilled a good deal of gasoline onto the deck and into the engine pit. Mrs. Morton wondered whether that was entirely safe, especially since both of the men were smoking cigarettes; but she said nothing.

One of the boatmen, as he worked, managed to cut his finger bloodily on a projecting bolt. He protested that the cut was nothing, and dripped a lavish decoration of gore onto the deck until Mrs. Morton insisted that he tie it up with a piece of clean waste. Presently the other man dropped a monkey-wrench overboard—resulting in an acrimonious debate between his partner and himself. Meanwhile Chango slipped on the gasoline-and-blood-wet deck, and got his clean trousers into a hideous state.

And then at last, for no evident reason at all, the engine responded to one more whirl of the flywheel, and coughed and choked, and started running with perfect smoothness.

"You see, Señora?" one of the boatmen said triumphantly. "You have to know how to do it!"

The launch resumed its journey up the lake. It was operating as nicely now as if it had never given the slightest trouble.

Mrs. Morton sighed with relief and tried to relax on her cushions. She did not want to spend the whole day moored to that bank. She wanted to see the Holy Painting of Jocotepec.

(4)

Again the plowed fields with their background of rocky cliffs moved by as if in procession. Pedro pointed out to her several prehistoric burial-places—spots where mortuary figures of baked clay and amazing twelve-inch neck ornaments, cut from a single piece of obsidian and shaped like a new moon, had been found. The shores of this lake had been, since time immemorial, the dwelling place of a succession of mysterious races that had left no records of themselves except their graves.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, the launch began to approach the low shores at the west end of the lake. The water grew shallow. Ten yards from shore there was no longer a sufficient depth for the keel, and the boat was unable to go closer to land.

The boatmen threw out the anchor. Chango rolled up his trousers to the thigh, stepped into the water, and carried Mrs. Morton to dry land as if she were a feather. He started to carry the aged Annunciata next, but Clara stopped him.

"She would be too tired if she came with us, Chango. She will stay here, and sleep."

Chango carried Clara ashore, and was about to roll down his trousers when he was hailed from the boat by Pedro.

"Jackass! Do you think I am going to get wet? You come back and carry me, too!"

Chango grinned sheepishly, returned to the boat, and carried Pedro ashore.

Annunciata, smiling her thin eager smile, waved her hand to them all, as they waved to her and started on their mile walk toward the village.

Mrs. Morton, with Clara at her side and Pedro and Chango trailing behind, proceeded with leisurely steps across the stretch of plain that separated the village from the lake-shore. Now that they were once on dry land, she felt no sense of haste. She rather liked to prolong her own suspense while she approached the spot where she was to view for the first time the Holy Painting of Jocotepec.

The scenes about her were curiously exciting to her eyes and to her memory. She felt almost sure that she must have seen this somewhere—and yet she knew definitely that she had never been here before.

She paused and looked about her. To the right she saw fields in which a peasant was plowing with a wooden plow that was drawn slowly along by two oxen. Ahead of her there plodded down the rutted road another span of oxen drawing a creaking cart whose wheels were hewn out of single slabs of wood. To her left lay a plain where, near a few trees, women were drawing water from a well; some of the women balanced water-jars on their black-shawled heads as they waited their turn. The grey fields spread in wide vistas on all sides.

And suddenly for her on this shore it was as if the veil

of time were lifted like a curtain, revealing a glimpse of a bygone patriarchal world. This was a world of flocks and herds, and toiling men, and women bearing water-jars on their firmly-upheld heads, and in the air was a grave and noble sadness. She had seen this landscape before . . . But where? . . .

Then it came back to her. It came back to her clearly. Out of her far-off misty recollections of youth, she recovered the memory . . . This was the sacred land of Palestine . . . Not the real Palestine, but a Palestine that was more real to her than truth. . . .

Like distant organ music, the effect came back to her. She was a child, and it was Sunday afternoon—and, as always on Sunday afternoon in her grandfather's house, silence was of the very essence of the air. Her grandfather and her grandmother and her tall lovely aunts moved about very little on that afternoon, and spoke scarcely at all. They were reading books, or sitting on the lawn beneath the great elm trees, or secluded in their own rooms. In her grandfather's house, the afternoon of the Sabbath was a time for solemn peace and meditation, enforced on all within his doors.

She herself was lying on her stomach on the floor of the small dim library, and was looking at a volume of steel engravings which she had taken down from the bookshelves. The title of the book was *Travels in Palestine*. She did not read any of the text, but the illustrations thrilled her with visions of a world different from the calm green England which was the only world she knew.

This depicted world was a grey, grave world—a world of bleak hills and olive trees and flocks grazing upon the

hills. It was a meager land, a land of the poor. Men were toiling in the fields, and beside wells there stood women bearing water-jars on their firmly-upheld heads. The land was sad, but the air was luminous. There was one picture of a very sick man, to whom another man was doing something. There was another picture of a man washing the feet of other very sad-looking men. And there was a picture of a man riding on an ass, while people strewed palm branches before him, and the domes of a great city rose shining across the shadow of the valley. She got up from the floor and rushed to her grandfather; he was dozing in his big leather chair in the corner. "Who is that, Grandfather?" He awoke, startled; in a moment he took the book from her, put on his spectacles, and looked at the picture. "That is Our Lord, my dear." He looked at her gravely, and gave her back the book. She returned to her refuge on the floor, and once more forgot England, and was part of Palestine. . . .

All this came back to her with the vividness of an hallucination as she walked slowly up from the shore of Lake Chapala toward the little town of Jocotepec.

(5)

The village was a low wide-spreading aggregation of brown adobe brick houses, all built even with the street, house against house in a continuous row without intervening space. Some of the walls were stuccoed with a coating of colored plaster over the clay surface—blue or yellow or faded pink.

As they drew near to the town, Mrs. Morton was startled

by a sound behind her. It was like a blare from a hoarse trumpet. She turned, and saw Chango blowing a triumphant blast on his empty beer bottle which he was still carrying with him. She was obliged to burst into laughter.

"Chango—you aren't Joshua, and we are not capturing Jericho. So throw your trumpet away! You hear me?"

"Yes, Señora." Regretfully he discarded the bottle; and they entered the town.

The streets were narrow: Mrs. Morton had to draw aside to permit the passage of an occasional creaking ox-cart or a file of burros laden with newly-cut green fodder. Sometimes at the street corners there stood one or two silent dark-eyed men, motionless figures with their arms folded under their bright-patterned blankets. They seemed to be staring at nothing, out of an internal mood of mild passive gloominess. An occasional dog nosed along the street, seeking offal. An old woman paused and stared up at the strangers from under her black shawl. A group of children dashed out of a patio, shrieked with astonishment, and scurried back into the safety of the courtyard from which they had emerged.

Some of the doors of the houses stood open—giving glimpses of sunlighted courtyards whose beauty was not hinted at by the monotony of the walls that shut them away from the street. These courtyards were abloom with radiant flowers—flowers that grew up out of huge earthen jars, or spread over narrow plots of soil that bordered the walls, or drooped down in cascades from painted bowls that hung suspended from the rafters of the galleries surrounding the court. In some of the patios bright-hued birds sang in their wicker cages; and from some of the enclosures

came the rhythmic hum of shuttles and hand looms, where the blanket weavers of Jocotepec, famous throughout this region, plied their ancient handicraft.

Mrs. Morton and her escorts emerged into the open plaza where, rising above the hard-baked earth and the few formal trees, the ornate little church lifted its filigreed towers. Here and there in the open space a crouching vendor of fruits or candies brooded above his outspread wares. Chango paused to buy a copper's worth of arsenic-colored sweets. Pedro led the way steadily onward.

They turned into a narrow cobbled street beyond the plaza. Marching along silently, hearing the dull echo of her own footsteps between the somber walls, Mrs. Morton again felt a return of her odd sense that this was really Palestine. Yes, this narrow stony lane was no ordinary street: this was none other than the Via Dolorosa, up which the Man of Sorrows, surrounded by the little dwellings of other sorrowing men, had once toiled with his grievous burden.

(6)

Pedro paused before a doorway. "This is the place the man told me to come, Señora."

The brown adobe house-front, broken only by the doorway and four small windows, gave no indication of the nature of the interior. "Well, if you think this is the house, knock," she said.

Pedro knocked on the blue-painted wooden door. It swung open; and there, obsequiously bowing, stood the gaunt lantern-jawed man who had come to the Villa Colima. His sunken eyes seemed more burning than ever,

but he was smiling with satisfaction at the arrival of his visitors.

He greeted them and stood aside to let them pass. Mrs. Morton led the way through the door, down a dim passage, and out into the patio. The little courtyard was paved with reddish tiles; around four sides of the enclosure ran a narrow gallery; the middle space was open to the blue of the sky. Here and there stood huge earthen jars out of which blossomed a profusion of scarlet and yellow flowers; and from the rafters of the galleries hung wicker baskets filled with damp moss out of which the surprising starlike beauty of orchids thrust their lavender and orange and iridian blooms. Flame-colored birds in cages hung against the brown adobe walls. In one corner stood an ancient stone well with a windlass of grey timber arching over it. From the back of the house came the subdued sound of women's voices and the occasional laugh of a child. A small rooster strutted out from the shelter of a corridor, surveyed the visitors with its head on one side, and scurried away.

Mrs. Morton paused a moment, admiring the gay little courtyard where so much charm had been so simply created. Though the actual conveniences of this dwelling were not greater than those of the bleakest London slum tenement, the sour gloom of those habitations was here replaced by sunlight and flowers.

The gaunt man opened a door leading off the patio and courteously motioned Mrs. Morton to enter. She found herself in a bare whitewashed room lighted by two small windows; it was unfurnished except for a cot-bed and a crucifix and two chairs. The man brought forward the chairs and placed them with their backs to the windows.

Mrs. Morton and Clara seated themselves; Pedro and Chango stood beside them, leaning their backs against the wall.

The man stood before them ceremoniously. "Señora, it was most gracious of you to come. I felt sure that so great a lady would not fail to keep her promise. And now, as the reward for all your trouble, you are to look upon the picture! The Holy Picture! The most wonderful picture in the world!"

He motioned to Pedro to come with him, went out into the patio, and disappeared through a doorway.

Mrs. Morton relaxed in her chair and smiled at Clara. She rather hoped that it would require some little time for the thin man to get the painting out of its hiding place. This moment of dramatic suspense was enjoyable to her; she wanted to prolong it. Now at last she was to see the painting! Her skeptical brain whispered to her that it would probably be a very disappointing object—merely some pious religious daub, the work of a zealous but incompetent amateur; the churches of Mexico were full of similar gaudy testimonials of faith. Yet of course there was a chance that this painting would be the exception. Meanwhile she delighted in the uncertainty.

Presently the lean man returned across the courtyard with Pedro. The two men were carrying a long heavy roll of canvas, grey with age and dust. Cautiously they brought their burden into the bare room and laid it down on the floor opposite Mrs. Morton.

The thin man crossed himself; Pedro followed his example. Then the two proceeded to untie four stout cords that were fastened around the canvas. The thin man

gathered the cords carefully together and deposited them in a corner. Then with Pedro's assistance he unrolled the picture; and the two men, one on each side of the canvas, grasped the corners and stretched their arms upward to full length, as they held the picture against the wall for Mrs. Morton's inspection.

It was a large, dim picture, seven feet high and five feet wide. The surface, darkened by many coats of varnish and by the dust of ages, was covered with a network of fine cracks, and in one corner the paint had flaked away entirely, leaving a small patch of naked canvas. But in spite of these superficial ravages of time, the painting was reasonably intact.

The first impression was one of ominous mystery. Dark clouds hung heavy in the sky, where one small patch of blue intensified rather than relieved the oppressiveness of the billowing gloom. In the foreground the parched and barren hillslope was cut across diagonally by one slender thread of water——an almost-dried brook that wended its purposeless way down toward the plains. Between the sky and the slope rose up the hill——a hill of jagged rocks, unanimated by a single living human figure . . . And on the distant crest stood the Cross, clearly outlined, with the vague drooping ruin of a body depending listlessly from it. The face was scarcely visible: the artist had chosen to concentrate all his meaning on the body's inert agony: the closed eyes gave out not even the gleam of anguish, and the lids were like curtains that veiled a pain too complete to be endurable in the light of day. The Crucifix stood alone in an inhuman waste of utter desolation.

Mrs. Morton was startled by the strangeness of the pic-

ture. In most paintings of the Crucifixion that she had seen, crowds of people or groups of Roman soldiers or kneeling saints or at least the two crucified thieves had brought some ameliorating touch of human life into the composition. But here there was no living figure and no trace of man's handiwork—save only the man-made cross of boards from which hung the tatters of mortality.

She wondered if this could be from the brush of El Greco. She wondered what refinement of mortal religious suffering had impelled the artist to rob the picture of all threads of consolation that could link this lonely agony to the ordinary evils that afflict mankind—creating here a monumental vision of the pain for which there is no help and no healing and no compensation.

The small dim room where she sat seemed to widen to the scope of the depicted sky—under which this symbol of the soul and of the body kept its timeless vigil with the powers of irredeemable suffering.

She realized that she was looking at a masterpiece. She stared at it in mingled wonder and horror and fascination.

After a while she turned and glanced at Clara. Clara's grave and beautiful face was devastated with grief, and she was crossing herself. Beyond her, Chango was kneeling on the earthen floor and muttering prayers.

Mrs. Morton motioned to the thin man and to Pedro that they might put down the picture. Carefully they lowered it to the floor.

The thin man stood up and looked at her inquiringly.

"I will buy the picture," she said, in a voice that did not sound to her exactly like her own. She fumbled in her black bag. She did not attempt the customary bargaining; she

produced the ninety pesos which the man had named as his asking price and handed them to him. Then she turned swiftly away, and went out into the sunlit patio where the bird songs and the profuse flowers were to her like air to a diver who had been long underseas.

(7)

When the little party left the house of the gay patio and the blue door, it took on almost the guise of an official procession. First walked Mrs. Morton, thumping the cobbled pavements with her stick and glancing about her with slightly preoccupied eyes. Clara walked a little behind her; her black shawl was drawn up over her head, and she did not raise her quiet glance from the pavement. Then followed Pedro and Chango in single file. On their shoulders they bore the long roll of the canvas, tied with four stout cords: it was heavy, and they paused occasionally to shift it from one shoulder to the other. At the rear, like the tail of a sedate kite, followed a straggling group of staring, giggling children, chewing sugar cane and pointing at the procession and bumping playfully into one another.

Mrs. Morton's mood was one of mixed feelings. A part of her mind was triumphant now that the quest for the Holy Painting had come to a successful conclusion; another part of her consciousness was slightly depressed by that sense of anticlimax which follows the completion of an anticipated project. Furthermore, she felt happy in having acquired the ownership of so important and striking a work of art, while on the other hand she was a little perplexed and troubled by the possession of so dramatic and weighty a

creation. It was a treasure, but it was also a responsibility: it was remarkable, but it was also rather terrifying . . . She was proud of her acquisition—yet she felt a little as if the splendid but onerous responsibilities of Prime Minister or President or Pope had been suddenly thrust upon her. She walked onward meditatively.

When they had emerged from the town, crossed the tilled plain and reached the low shore, they found their boat moored just where they had left it. The aged Annunciata hailed them with cries and smiles as they arrived at the water's edge. She slapped the two grinning boatmen on the shoulders and pointed eagerly at the burden of rolled-up canvas which Pedro and Chango were carrying. Apparently the old woman was in fine spirits and had become a boon-companion of the boatmen: doubtless the three of them had been having a long, gossipy conversation during the absence of their employer.

Chango, on a word from Pedro, again rolled up his white trousers to the thigh, managed with some difficulty to shoulder the heavy canvas, and by a heroic effort staggered through the shallow water and safely delivered the precious object into the solicitous hands of the boatmen. Then he waded back to the shore and in turn carried Mrs. Morton, Clara and Pedro out to the boat without accident. He then leaped on board; Pedro gave a lordly wave of the hand to the two mariners; and with no remonstrance from the engine the boat began slowly to start on its return progress down the lake.

Mrs. Morton subsided into her seat with a sigh of slight weariness and of relief. The great expedition was over! There at her feet lay the rolled-up painting, and here she

and her party were safely on board again. Everything had turned out splendidly, and everybody seemed happy.

In the late afternoon, the prow of the boat slipped smoothly through the glassy water. The low shores of Jocotepec faded behind them; ahead of them opened the wide lake with its osier-fringed shores from which mounted up the surrounding silhouettes of grey-blue peaks. There beyond the crests—invisible from this western end of the lake—hid the great silent volcano Colima; and in the opposite direction, far away, the peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl were keeping their eternal watch over the Valley of Mexico.

A peaceful hour. Mrs. Morton noted vaguely that the tops of a few massive clouds were greyly showing above the crests of the southern mountains; but they did not especially attract her attention and she thought no more of them. Her eyes closed, and with the rhythmic beat of the engine humming in her ears, she fell into a peaceful doze.

When she awoke, it was with a start as though a loud noise had aroused her. Then she realized that it was not a noise but an unexpected silence that had broken the continuity of her sleep. It was the silence of the boat engine, which had suddenly ceased to emit its monotonous chug-chug and no longer imparted its vibration to the hull of the craft. The boat drifted inertly through the water.

The two boatmen began to argue heatedly with each other. Their mutual recriminations, spoken in some curious local dialect and accompanied by vehement gesticulations, were unintelligible to Mrs. Morton. The debate gave promise of being of endless duration.

Mrs. Morton spoke sharply to Pedro. "Tell them to stop

this chattering and get to work! We don't want to spend the night on the lake!"

The two men ceased from their debate and turned to the engine. They screwed and unscrewed nuts, and tinkered with wires, and poured gasoline almost at random into various parts of the machine, and labored at whirling the heavy flywheel. Nothing happened.

Pedro stood near them intently watching their futile labors. Suddenly he began to splutter angrily, and pointed his finger at a certain spot. The boatmen looked at the place to which he pointed. There, drooping inert and disconsolate, was the broken fan-belt whose failure to function was the cause of this latest trouble.

"Put on a new fan-belt, and let us go!" Pedro said impatiently.

One of the boatmen shook his head. "We have no spare fan-belt. They don't often break like this."

Without a word, Pedro unfastened and took off his leather belt. "You can make one of this, can't you?"

The boatmen stared at him in astonishment, took the belt, examined it, looked at each other, and finally nodded.

"Well, hurry up!" Pedro handed them a long, sharp knife which he pulled out from under his clothes.

By dint of cutting the leather to the right length, punching holes in the ends, and splicing them with twine, the two men managed to concoct a substitute fan-belt. When it was completed and in place, they gave their work a final survey and then spun the wheel. The boat began to move.

"That shows what skill in the handling of engines can accomplish," one of the men said complacently. Pedro scowled but remained silent.

An hour of time had been wasted. Dusk was beginning to descend upon the lake. Mrs. Morton noted with slight alarm that the bank of clouds had by this time lifted itself high above the crests of the mountains and was moving nearer. The sun, which was now pouring out a fan-shaped aureole of golden rays, seemed to linger for a moment—and then, with a last blinding flash of light on the ripples of the lake, it disappeared behind the dark impenetrable cloud wall.

Mrs. Morton looked at Pedro and pointed questioningly at the approaching cloud bank. He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head gloomily.

"You think we will get home in time?"

"I think so, Señora. If the storm does not come too fast. And if the engine does not break down again."

"Well, at least we are in the very middle of the lake, and we can't be wrecked against the shore."

"No. But the boat is very small—and as the Señora knows, the waves can be very big."

She knew well. She had often seen them come riding in mountain-high, terrifying in their force.

Darkness had now fallen. The boatmen lighted their red and green lights to port and starboard and their white light forward and aft. A strong wind began to blow from the south.

The water grew choppy and the movement of the boat as it forged ahead became slightly unpleasant. Very rapidly the size of the waves increased, rocking the boat from side to side. Mrs. Morton had always been a fairly good sailor on large ships, but this swift uneasy tossing made her feel a little queer.

She thought of a precautionary step. "Pass around what is left of the lunch basket to everyone, Pedro."

Pedro obeyed, stumbling about in the darkness as the boat lurched in sudden jerks from side to side. Mrs. Morton nibbled a bit of bread and felt better. Clara and Annunciata, huddled together in the bow, declined food. The boatmen seized and devoured huge chunks of bread and cheese.

Chango, slinking up to the basket when Pedro put it down, managed to extract several bananas and a bottle of beer. In a moment they had disappeared down his throat. He sat down on the floor, grinning contentedly. But after a moment an expression of anxiety came upon his face. His eyes rolled. He staggered to his feet, groped his way forward, and leaned over the rail. Mrs. Morton put her hands over her ears to shut out the unbelievable variety of anguished sounds that came from him.

As she looked out through the darkness at the rapidly mounting waves and felt the boat quivering under her, she was very uneasy. She did not feel at all certain that this small craft could live in such turbulent waters. She knew that the light fishing-craft were sometimes swamped by storms, and she feared a little for the fate of this old and clumsy vessel that now bore seven lives. If only they could hurry faster!

"Are you going as fast as you can?" she asked one of the boatmen.

As if in ironic response to her question, the engine stopped dead.

A feeling of hopelessness came upon her as the boatmen and Pedro hurried to the side of the stricken engine. She

had a premonition that this last collapse of the machinery was a final one. Silent, she sat amid her cushions in the stern and watched the futile efforts of the men.

They chattered, they poked about, they lighted matches, they peered—dark silhouetted figures amidships in the tossing boat. She watched them idly. Her complete inability to be of use had a paralyzing effect on her consciousness, and instead of feeling frightened she seemed sunk in a vast indifference.

If the boat capsized and they all perished, then they would all perish; and there was nothing to do about the matter. There drifted back into her mind the question that had been put to her by the wild man who had sold her the fish: "Are you afraid of death, Señora?" She smiled a little as she realized that death was as unimaginable to her, here and now, as it had been on that calm evening when she was sitting safely on her terrace. No, she was not afraid: she was merely very much displeased by this uncomfortable and threatening situation. Clara and Annunciata, dim figures ahead in the bow, clung together and never stirred.

Back and forth, back and forth, the boat rocked with exhausting monotony. Endless hours of this bleak emptiness lay ahead of them to be endured second by second. Impatience would not help them; nothing would help them except slow dull animal endurance. She tried to keep her mind off the picture of a capsized boat and seven struggling swimmers—or the still more terrible picture of a sudden igniting of the spilled gasoline, and the boat wrapped in flames. She remembered having heard that in such a case the passengers should jump to windward, so that they might not be caught in the pools of burning oil that would

be swept to leeward. Her imagination already saw the dark waters lighted up by that flickering deadly flare. And for a moment she knew what fear was.

She heard the boatmen quarreling again as they continued to tinker with the silent engine. She could tell from the tones of their voices that they had given up serious hope of righting the trouble, and were now merely blaming each other for the catastrophe. She smiled grimly as she recalled how she had told Pedro to bring his guitar—so that he could play and sing to them as they moved homeward through the moonlight!

She settled down to the dreary monotony of waiting. How terrible was the power of unleashed wind and waves —how utterly indifferent to the fate of man! She realized for the first time that the fury of the seas is a more terrifying thing to confront than the bared teeth of wild beasts. The beasts and man have at least the spark of life in common: but man and the sea are alike in absolutely nothing. The force of the waters has not even the comprehensibility of malignant purpose: it is the quintessence of mindless horrible infinity. It is the blank face of the unconscious, unveiled at last.

Pedro left the boatmen and came back to where she sat. At each step he staggered as the uneasy swinging of the boat deprived him of all surety. He paused before her, clutching a stanchion and swaying to and fro as he talked to her in a low voice:

"Señora, do not be worried. All may be well. But if things go wrong, I have thought it all out, what we are to do. I am a strong swimmer; I can swim for hours. I will take you to land if you will just hold onto me; it is not

more than a couple of miles. And I have told Chango to take Clara and the old woman; he is strong enough to take them both if they will hold onto him. The old woman will probably die in the water, but we cannot help that; and after that it will be easier for Chango to go on with Clara."

"Very well, Pedro. I shall not get hysterical in the water. Just do the best you can, and let it go at that. If I become too heavy a burden, you are to leave me and save yourself. I used to be able to swim a little. You hear me? You hear me?"

He did not reply.

She added more lightly: "Well, it will be good-by to the Holy Picture, I'm afraid!"

"Oh no, Señora! I have told the boatmen that they are to carry that with them as they swim, and that it will surely get safely ashore and save them too. They will need it, for they are poor swimmers."

A secret ironic smile touched her lips as she noted that even the pious Pedro had entrusted the two least important lives to the tender mercies of the miracle-working painting, and had reserved the care of her own life to himself.

Pedro went forward, lurching at every step, and sat down beside the two boatmen. They had now given up their attempts to fix the engine and had resigned themselves to fate. The boat rocked dizzily and helplessly in the trough of the waves.

Unmarked by the passage of moon or stars, the slow night hung like a pall of lead over the tossing lake. It was a trackless wilderness of time encircling a trackless wilderness of waves. The wind grew chilly. Spray came dashing

over the gunwales in driven sheets. The seven miserable passengers drooped in separate prisons of silent woe.

Mrs. Morton hardly knew whether she slept or not; her consciousness had retreated to some grey twilight world of vegetable inertness. She thought of the phrase, "the footfalls of time." In this region of monotony, there were no footfalls to mark the passage of anything. This was mere naked existence, in all its empty horror.

She did not know how long she remained sunk in this drowse of misery. It seemed an eternity.

Then suddenly she was aroused by a powerful light that flashed blindingly into her eyes. She started up, alarmed.

No, it was not the flash of exploding gasoline. It was the steady beam of a searchlight that came from the surrounding darkness. And she heard a voice shouting. Pedro stumbled toward her.

"What is that?"

"Thank God, Señora, it is the other boat! Sometimes when one boat is late in returning, people know that it has broken down—and then the other boat may come out to find it. Now they will tow us home, and we are safe."

"Does this happen often?" she asked angrily. Now that the peril was past, she was able to recover her feeling of disgust at such inefficiency.

"The boatmen say it sometimes happens, Señora."

The rescue boat approached them, circled cautiously around them with numerous shoutings through the darkness, and at last a rope was tossed, caught, and made fast. In another instant, safely in tow, the belated picnic party was moving rapidly up the lake toward home.

Clara aroused herself and murmured: "Thanks be to the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Picture has been saved!"

(8)

By the next morning, Mrs. Morton found that, except for a slight fatigue, she had quite recovered from the unpleasant and dangerous adventure of the preceding day. As she surveyed the episode in retrospect, its potential seriousness grew rather than diminished in her mind. They had been in genuine peril of losing their lives in a most unpleasant way; and she wondered now how she had been able to remain so calm through it all. Perhaps actual present danger has the power to instill into the soul a kind of cold paralyzing anesthesia that inhibits panic. This inertia, this unawareness, seemed to her a slightly different thing from true courage: it was a desirable thing, but not quite of the stature of deliberate heroism.

Putting aside these philosophical reflections which seemed not to be proving very much, she took up her stick and proceeded to make a survey of her domain, from which she felt she had been absent for a long time. Nothing seemed altered. The garden, unhurt by the storm, glowed as usual under the sunny blue sky. Chango, now recovered from his unfortunate aquatic adventures, was busy amid the flower beds with his usual silly and amiable smile. He took off his hat, bowed, and scraped his bare feet together.

"Very nice beer yesterday! Very nice beer!" That was apparently all that his confused mind had retained of their adventures.

In the kitchen Mrs. Morton found Clara composed and

dignified as usual. She learned that the aged Annunciata had suffered no ill effects and that she was most grateful to the Señora for the outing. The old woman had, however, extracted from Clara a promise that, living or dead, her fragile mortal bones were never to be taken out on the lake again; and she had begged from Clara a peso, to be given to the priest for a thank-offering of candles in celebration of their providential escape from peril.

Mrs. Morton took a peso out of her black bag and handed it to Clara. "I think that I am the person who is responsible for that expenditure." And she went away before Clara could protest.

As she passed through the hallway, she saw lying on the floor the rolled-up canvas that had been the prime cause of all their adventures. She must of course have it mounted on a stout stretcher and surrounded by a proper frame. She knew exactly the kind of frame that would be appropriate —an old-fashioned design—a wide outside strip of polished black and a narrow inside strip of dull gold. Since the picture was so large, the frame would have to be correspondingly massive—perhaps four inches wide for the black and an inch wide for the gold. And the black part to be slightly rounded.

Ysidoro Juarez the carpenter was a good and careful workman when he was sober, and this undertaking would be greatly to his taste. He loved jobs that required a little invention and ingenuity, and since he was a very pious son of the Church he would be sure to handle this task with particular care.

She summoned Pedro and gave him the necessary instruction. He smiled in approval.

"I did not think that the Señora would permit the Holy Painting to remain rolled up that way, like a pig tied in a sack. It would not seem quite respectful."

He summoned Chango from the garden; and the two men, shouldering the roll of canvas, started off down the street toward the workshop of Ysidoro Juarez.

(9)

A few days later, a solemn procession appeared at the gate of the Villa Colima. Several small boys ran ahead of it and behind it, shouting and prancing; but the main body of the procession was very sedate. It consisted of Ysidoro Juarez, the carpenter, leading the way; he was followed by four ragged men who sweated beneath the burden of a large four-cornered flat object covered with burlap.

Pedro swung open the gate of the patio and admitted the cortege. Ysidoro gave the orders to his henchmen until the object they carried was safely inside the gate and the gate was closed again. Then, with a gesture like that of an admiral relinquishing the command of a flagship to his duly authorized successor, Ysidoro signified that he recognized Pedro's right to take charge of the proceedings from this point onward.

"Remove the burlap!" Pedro commanded. "And then carefully, most carefully, wipe off the frame and the picture with this cloth. See that there is not a grain of dust left!" He handed Ysidoro a clean dish-towel of Clara's which he had abstracted from the kitchen. Then he went into the house and paused at the foot of the stairs.

"Señora!" he called out excitedly. "The Holy Picture has

come! Ysidoro and his men have brought it. What shall I have done with it?"

"Oh, it has come, has it! Well, I think it would be best to have it hung while Ysidoro and his men are here to handle it. Have them take down my daughter's portrait of Clara from the north wall of the living-room and hang the new picture in its place."

She was reluctant to take down this serene and beautiful picture of Clara, but there was nothing else to do.

"Put it just in the same spot—and have the distances from the top of the frame to the ceiling and from the bottom of the frame to the floor exactly equal."

"Yes, Señora."

"And when it is finished, call me and I will come down."

"Yes, Señora."

She was intentionally restraining her curiosity: she wanted to get her first glimpse of the painting when it was completely installed in the spot she had selected for it. She foresaw that it would perhaps be a little large for the room, but she meant to try it there anyhow.

From downstairs she heard the sound of shuffling feet and the commands of Pedro as, with military briskness copied from the young lieutenant who had once paid them so unwelcome a visit, he directed the carrying of the picture through the hallway and into the living-room. Then the sound of a step-ladder being brought in from the kitchen. Then discussion between Pedro and Ysidoro. Then hammering. Then more shuffling of feet. Then numerous commands from both Pedro and Ysidoro. Then silence.

"Señora," she heard Pedro's voice from the lower hall, "the Holy Picture is ready."

She descended the stairs. There in the living-room stood Ysidoro Juarez and his four men and Pedro and Clara and Chango. All of them stood silent and solemn in front of the painting. They respectfully fell back and made way for her as she entered the room.

Ysidoro Juarez bowed with solemn unction. "God be with you, Señora! I have brought you back your picture, complete and perfect. Ah, it is a Holy Picture! I, Ysidoro Juarez, who have framed it—I should know!"

"Yes, he should know!" echoed the four shabby men, like a trained chorus.

Mrs. Morton placed herself before the picture and looked at it in silence. It took her some time to accustom herself to so strange a presence here in her dwelling.

It was indeed a holy picture. There could be no doubt about that. The ominous weight of the dark sky and the bleak parched soil of the earth were like mute witnesses to the central pattern of agony—where the single cross, stark and pitiless, upbore its shapeless inhuman burden. A mute grief, a wordless desolation of earth and the heavens, seemed concentrated toward the one central point in a silence that was more unbearable than any utterance. And the vagueness of the lone figure, the ambiguity of the drooping and expressionless form and face, opened wide the gates of the spectator's imagination and left him free to impart to the lineaments the characteristics of his own most secret and private nightmare-image of horror.

Mrs. Morton backed away from it a little to see it the better. Yes, just as she had felt when she first set eyes on it in the little house at Jocotepec, it was a remarkable creation. She did not know of any painting quite like it. It must

be the work of some follower of El Greco; it had something of the unexpected color, the tortured line, the burning fanaticism that distinguished that great master.

Here in the quiet conventional living-room, the passion of the artist seemed almost to explode from the frame. Strange as the picture had seemed to her when she first saw it amid the primitive and bleak world of Jocotepec, it seemed a thousand times stranger here. It spoke of sufferings that were unknown to her, and of a barbaric delight in pain that was alien to her, and of a supine humility that was repellent to her deepest soul. What madness had induced man to compensate for his own sufferings by choosing for himself a crucified god? What ignominity of defeat had made him postpone to the world of the hereafter his vision of the soul's triumph, and accept mortal life as a mere vale of tears? What lack of Promethean fire had driven man to claim this image of empty darkness as his savior?

Dimly brooding before the picture, she heard her companions murmuring to one another in hushed voices.

"A Holy Picture!"

"The Savior Himself! Oh *Maria Santissima*, intercede for us!"

"See the blood on His hands!"

"See the nails through His feet! They are like real nails; you could touch them!"

"His Spirit has already gone up to Heaven, has it not?"

"Now you can pray right here, can't you, Clara——instead of going to church?"

She stood perplexed. The longer she looked at the painting, the more convinced she was that it was a remarkable work of art. And the more completely certain she became

that it was the most ghastly picture in the world, and that she never wanted to set eyes on it again. She shuddered as she thought of it as her perpetual companion here in this peaceful living-room in place of the tranquil portrait of Clara. No, no, no! she said to herself almost hysterically.

Uncertain as to her own intentions, she turned to her awe-stricken companions.

"What do you think of it, Ysidoro Juarez?"

"Oh, a Holy Painting, Señora, a Holy Painting! I who have framed it should know!"

"And you, Pedro?"

"Now I know why we were saved that night on the lake, when I thought we must die. The power of the Blessed God saved us because you had bought the painting. If you had not bought it, Señora, we would all have been drowned."

"And you, Chango?"

Chango grinned foolishly and muttered something unintelligible and crossed himself.

"And you, Clara?"

"Señora, it is the holiest thing I have ever seen. It is holier than even the great amethyst cross. It is so holy that God would not permit it to be in the possession of anyone but a very saintly heart. He permits the Señora to have it: he would not permit an ordinary person to have it." Clara's eyes were wet with tears of deep emotion as she spoke.

Suddenly Mrs. Morton's heart gave a bound of relief. Clara, with her usual power of intuition, had unwittingly discovered the way out of a situation that was becoming a little nightmarish. Instantly her mind was made up.

"My friends," she said, addressing their intent faces with

the utmost gravity, "I am glad that you have helped me to come to a decision. When I bought this painting last week at Jocotepec, I did so because I thought it was wonderful, and because I wished to have it for my own. Now that we have it here, and now that we see it so well framed by Ysidoro, and now that it hangs there where we can all perceive how wonderful it is—now I realize that my first idea was wrong. This is not a painting that should belong to any one person. It is not suitable that any one person should be able to say, 'This Holy Painting is mine.' Do you understand me?"

A little murmur of bewildered and hesitant assent arose from the eight listeners.

"And so I have made up my mind. Ysidoro Juarez, direct your men, and have them take down the painting, and rest it carefully on the floor there."

In confused silence, the order was obeyed.

"Now," Mrs. Morton said, "this is what shall be done: You will carry the painting out of the house, and down the street, and across the plaza, and to the church. And there you will tell the priest that you are the bearers of a gift—and that the painting is to belong to the church, and to stay there always."

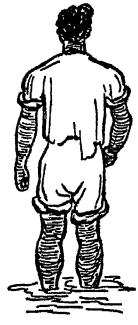
A murmur of astonishment and approving awe arose from the little group. "But Señora, what a princely gift!" Ysidoro Juarez murmured.

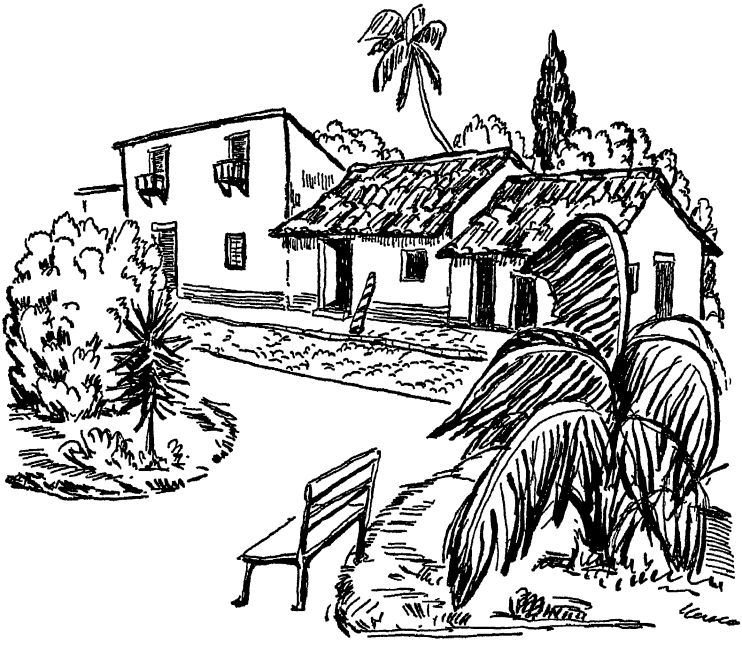
She turned to him. "And now listen to me, Ysidoro! As soon as you can, you are to make a small brass tablet that is to be fastened with screws onto the bottom of the frame of the picture. And on the tablet is to be the inscription:

You hear me? You hear me?"

"Yes, Señora."

Pedro stood frozen into an image of incredulous amazement. Chango grinned complacently and shuffled his feet. Clara stared at Mrs. Morton and then burst into tears of affectionate and pious gratitude.





IX

MRS. MORTON'S ENEMY

THE INSTALLATION of *The Holy Painting of Jocotepec*, as it came to be called by everyone, raised Mrs. Morton's popularity among the villagers to almost new heights. Her unpremeditated act in getting rid of her white elephant took on, in the eyes of the people, the aspect of a long-planned and brilliantly executed act of benevolence and piety. How silently and how cleverly she had matured her plans!—never disclosing a hint of them to anyone, biding her time, then suddenly sailing down the lake to Jocotepec, con-

fronting the owner of the hidden Holy Picture, thrusting vast sums of gold into his hands, and bearing away in triumph this wonderful and miracle-working image of Christ the Savior, which was now to bless Chapala with its presence forever.

That is was a miracle-working picture was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. Was not the story of the night on the stormy lake enough? One of the boatmen now remembered that a light glowed forth from the painting as it lay on the bottom of the boat. Annunciata affirmed with the greatest positiveness that, when the storm was at its worst, she had with her own eyes seen the luminous figure of Christ walking on the dark waters and with His Sacred Hands repelling the most threatening of the waves. Chango admitted that at times during that night of ordeal he had heard angel voices singing. And in spite of Mrs. Morton's indignant denial, it was persistently rumored that she had started out on her quest at the behest of a vision, in which an angel, clothed in white robes and bearing a silver trumpet, had exhorted her to seek the painting and bring it to Chapala. Not all of these stories were believed by everyone; but everyone except a small faction was convinced that the presence of the Holy Painting on the boat had been the cause of saving the lives of the seven voyagers.

And from that time on, a special degree of respect was accorded Mrs. Morton. The priest wrote to her an ornate letter of thanks for her benefaction, and called her meritorious act to the attention of his parishioners in an eloquent sermon. To her considerable annoyance, rumors began to circulate that she had accepted the Catholic faith and was about to be publicly baptized. It was understood that

Chango was the authority for this statement; and not even Clara's and Pedro's denials of the truth of it were sufficient to dispel it entirely.

Naturally the status of the three servants was much enhanced in the esteem of the community. Not only were they the attendants of so remarkable a mistress, but they had themselves been present when the Miraculous Voyage of the Holy Painting had taken place. A certain small faction in the village, jealous of their preëminence, was circulating a rumor that the painting had not been brought by them, but that—as had happened in the case of other sacred relics in ancient times—the painting had propelled itself automatically from Jocotepec down the lake to the shores of Chapala, and had been washed up by a great wave, and had deposited itself on the steps of the church without aid of human hands. But this apocryphal story made little headway: the evidence of the expensive brass plate, bearing the names of Clara, Pedro and Chango, was well-nigh indisputable.

At moments, Mrs. Morton was a little annoyed by all this chatter about her impulsive act. And her wrath really rose high when she found an elaborate account of the whole episode published with embellishments in a Guadalajara newspaper. Some wretched reporter had got hold of the tale and had let his imagination run riot. She was particularly infuriated by his vivid pen picture of herself, standing at the bow of the ship and, with appropriate gestures, delivering orations of courage to the frightened crew.

Her vexation was somewhat mollified by a half-humorous letter from Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano. "I can imagine," he wrote, "how your excellent firm jaw clenches

in righteous rage as you read the recent tributes to your heroism and piety. I have little doubt that your courage, though less melodramatically expressed than the reporter supposed, was as great as he states: but my long knowledge of your character forces me to doubt whether your piety and your love of the Catholic Church are quite as exemplary as this account alleges them to be.

"I suspect that you may be regretting now your act in presenting the picture. I pray you not to do so. It is merely a deed that is in complete harmony with the wise policy you have always adopted. You have never attempted to interfere with the simple faith of these people; you have always maintained an attitude of respect for their private beliefs; and you have accepted their customs and outward observances with punctilious courtesy. That was wisdom. It is not the mark of an independent mind, but of an insensitive one, to deny respectful acquiescence to the rites of an alien faith in a land whose hospitality he has accepted.

"And this is a good occasion for me to mention my long-time delight in seeing how you have made these simple, kindly people your friends. If they at times seem cruel and callous, it is only because they are hard-driven and confused by the complexities of life. You have understood that: as a result, you are surrounded by a friendliness that ought to bring you great satisfaction. I do not believe that you have a single enemy in the whole world."

She put down the letter, much pleased by these affectionate words from her old friend. She reflected on them. Yes, he was right. In all the years of her stay in Chapala, she had known nothing but perfect peace and security: she had not a single enemy.

And then there came an unexpected day when this pleasant dream was shattered. . . .

It burst upon her as a surprise and a very painful one when she learned that she did have an enemy. She had lived here so long and had been so long the friend and neighbor of everyone in the village that she did not understand how even the fantastic Mexican mind could invent an enemy for her. Yet an enemy she undoubtedly had.

The first time she became aware of it was on a sunny morning when she had left the gates of her house and was walking with brisk though careful eighty-year-old strides down to the market place. She wanted to buy a lace shawl for Clara, whose Saint's Day was tomorrow. Her stick thumped regularly and firmly on the cobblestones as she passed along the west side of the small plaza where stood the gimcrack band-stand amid its grass and flower beds.

Then she heard an odd sound. It came from the far side of the plaza, which she could not see distinctly because the dust and the morning sunlight made a golden curtain against her eyes. A rude voice was calling out: "Whang! Whang! Whang! Whang!"

She realized that the voice was trying to mimic the sound of her walking-stick. She pretended to pay no attention and passed onward with unchanged step. A derisive howl followed after her. As she turned into a narrow street leading to the market place, the memory of that ridicule walked beside her like a grinning ghost. She could not imagine who had cared to do this unpleasant thing; the sound and the intention of it haunted her. Never before

had the people of Chapala treated her with anything but meticulous politeness and respect.

The second time that her enemy called himself to her attention was a week later, when she had quite forgotten the first episode. She was walking along the east side of the plaza; her stick sounded on the cobblestones. Just before she reached the narrow doorway of the village barbershop she saw an angry lean head thrust out like the head of a Jack-in-the-box. It was Manuel Sandoval the barber.

Manuel scowled at her, and with a grotesque gesture brandished his naked razor three times in the air as if he were beheading three giants. Then in silence his melancholy face disappeared into the depths of his shop.

Mrs. Morton walked on, giving no outward sign that she had seen this extraordinary performance. But she was perplexed and troubled. Only a few times had she ever had occasion to exchange a greeting with the lantern-jawed barber; and it had never been more than a smile and a courteous "*A Dios, Señora!*" "*A Dios, Señor!*" Sometimes after meeting him she had reflected that he looked as the great Don Quixote might have looked if Don Quixote had been half Spanish and half Indian and had cut off his beard. Manuel, clean-shaven and stern, intent like a mouse on his own affairs which perhaps loomed as large to him as palace walls do to a mouse, had seemed to her like a humble parody of that oversensitive Knight of La Mancha whose sublime, mad, whiskered ghost would haunt the memories of mankind forever.

She was aware now that her enemy was none other than this odd barber. But she racked her brain in vain to recall

any possible episode that could have given rise to his hostility. Perhaps the man was a little mad.

The third time that she encountered her foe was very startling. She was strolling quietly in the midst of the grass plots and bright flower beds of the plaza; her thoughts were far away, seeing pleasant pictures of old days and old faces and the village lanes of the England of her girlhood. She paused in her stroll, let her mind return to the present, and stood looking out at the superb expanse of Lake Chapala and the far mountains that rose beyond it. For the thousandth time she said to herself that nowhere on earth was there such peace and beauty as this.

Suddenly she heard a howl behind her. She turned quickly. There was Manuel rushing out of his rat-hole doorway into the middle of the street; his gaunt face was distorted with rage. He held a pistol in his skinny hand; the hand was trembling. Fixing his cavernous eyes on Mrs. Morton, he lifted his arm and fired the pistol three times into the air.

"That will teach you, that will teach you!" he shrieked, and fired into the air twice again. Then he fled back into the dim recesses of his shop.

Mrs. Morton paused a moment to show that she was not frightened and then walked deliberately onward. But her outward appearance belied her feelings. She was very much perturbed, very unhappy. Animosity from anyone was like a black cloud in the air, darkening her sunlight. She was not used to it; it upset her whole balance of equilibrium with the universe; it was torture. And she could imagine no reason to account for this burst of rage that flamed toward her out of the perturbed heart of Manuel.

She walked homeward, very unhappy.

That night after dinner as she was sitting on the terrace and looking out at the garden and the lake, she had a brilliant thought. She would consult the sublime Clara.

Mrs. Morton had always maintained to her friends, and almost believed, that Clara was either an Indian princess or some reincarnation of the terrestrial aspect of the Madonna. How old was Clara? Was she thirty or forty or fifty or timeless? No one could answer. She carried her head as if the profound sadness of her eyes would never be able to weigh down or overcome the proud dignity of her body.

"Clara," Mrs. Morton said, "I have had an unpleasant experience today. And it is not the first time. A week ago, Manuel Sandoval, the barber, jeered at me; the second time, he brandished his razor at me; today, the third time, he came out with a pistol and began firing shots over my head. Can you explain anything of this? What has Manuel against me—do you know? I've never injured him; in fact, I barely know him to speak to."

Clara's face became clouded with confusion, but her voice was clear. "Ah, Señora, everyone knows that Manuel is a little queer. He can read, you know; and he reads books of poetry and stories of Spain and things that mix up people's minds. He was probably dreaming when he acted so terribly toward the Señora. I beg you, Señora, not to let it trouble you. It means nothing, nothing. Manuel is an innocent; he would not hurt you; no, he would not hurt a fly."

"So that is all you can tell me about it, is it, Clara?"

"That is all I know, Señora."

"Very well." Mrs. Morton felt quite sure that Clara's embarrassed manner indicated the existence of vast caves

of further knowledge; but she had learned from experience never to press a Mexican beyond the point of willing speech. If you did so, all you got was an intricate confusion of statement in which probably not even the speaker would ever be able to distinguish the inventions from the truth.

"Well, thank you, Clara," she said. "Probably the matter is nothing."

"Nothing, Señora!"

"Good-night, Clara. Sleep well."

Two evenings later Mrs. Morton happened to do a thing she seldom did—she went out into the kitchen after dinner to speak to Clara about some trifle. Groping her way through the passage, she emerged into the dim adobe-walled room of the kitchen itself. She understood little about this kitchen even though it was her own. This was Clara's demesne, her landed estate, her region of sole and lawful possession. Mrs. Morton had always understood fully that the more she kept herself out of the kitchen and its mysteries, the better for her.

This evening she noted the long ranges of little charcoal cooking-holes over which Clara performed her incantations that resulted in such nice food. She saw the earthernware pots and pans and other implements that might have come out of the stone age. They were the utensils that Clara preferred; she and her ancestors had used the like of these for centuries; and she had always refused to have any traffic with the more modern aluminum equipment which her mistress had tried to recommend to her.

Two candles were burning on the table, throwing Rembrandtesque sepia shadows into the corners of the room

and lighting up two faces. There on stiff chairs sat Clara and the lean-faced melancholy barber.

Manuel rose. Obviously he was confused; he stood in a respectful attitude and twisted his hat in an embarrassment of melancholy silence, miserably voiceless.

Mrs. Morton said: "Good evening, Manuel. This is lovely weather, is it not? Since you are here, I hope that Clara will not forget to offer you some of the very nice little cakes she made this afternoon. And, Clara, you know where the bottle of port is. A glass of that would be pleasant with the cakes."

Clara did not speak. Her grave, beautiful face remained inscrutable. Mrs. Morton nodded to the pair, and went back to the living-room. She settled down and tried to read a detective-story. But somehow she could not concentrate her attention on the trivialities of crime tonight.

Half an hour later, when Mrs. Morton was almost asleep over her book, Clara came into the room. Instantly Mrs. Morton was fully awake. She saw that Clara was perturbed and nervous.

"Well, Clara, did Manuel enjoy your cakes and port?"

"No, Señora. We forgot about that."

"Manuel has gone, then?"

"Yes, Señora."

"What did he come for? Did he want to talk with me? If so, why didn't he?"

"No, Señora." Clara burst into tears. "He came to see me. And everything is my fault. The Señora can never forgive me."

"Why, Clara, don't be so foolish. Nothing is your fault. You hear me? Nothing is your fault! Now just stop crying

and tell me all about everything. You will not be blamed."

In a moment Clara was able to restrain her outburst of woe and to resume her usual monumental composure. "You see, Señora," she began, "Manuel is a little queer, but he is a very nice man. He is not like these common men who want to paw you with their hands before they even know who you are. No, Manuel is not like that. Sometimes he is very attractive. Sometimes he talks wonderfully about far-off things that I have never heard of but that may be true. He tells me stories about some old Spanish knight who carried a lance and who wore a brass barber's-basin as his helmet—and Manuel says that this makes all barbers of noble lineage forever. I do not understand it all; but that is the way Manuel talks."

"I think I understand, Clara; and maybe Manuel is right. And . . . ?"

"Well, Señora, perhaps you will not be able to believe this—but Manuel has almost driven me out of my senses, because for a long time he has been begging me to marry him."

Mrs. Morton was startled. She had not dreamed that Clara had a suitor. The mere thought of losing Clara was catastrophe. And there was something about Clara's aloof, grave, inviolate beauty that made the thought of human marriage incongruous. But Mrs. Morton put these thoughts aside and bravely asked: "And are you going to marry him, Clara?"

"I? Marry that image of a scarecrow?" Clara laughed. "No, Señora, I have seen trouble enough in my life without going out into the street and hunting for it. Why should I

leave you when I am so contented here? No, Señora, I am not going to marry Manuel or any other fool."

"Have you told him so?"

"One thousand times! I swear it by the Blessed Virgin!"

"Then why does he keep coming to see you?"

"Señora, he is a little crazy. He has an idea. He says that he is convinced now that I really will not marry him. He swears that he will never ask me again—that he has dismissed that thought from his head. But he wants me to do something else; and he says he will never give up that hope till he dies."

Mrs. Morton braced herself to hear some immoral proposal of seduction or free-love. "And what is this other thing?"

"He wants me to have my hair cut off."

"What? Have your hair cut off?"

"Yes, Señora. He says that he has read in books that many great queens of olden times wore their hair short, and that with his own eyes he has seen in the movies at Guadalajara how all the great movie queens of today have short hair. And he says that I must let him cut my hair—that he cannot be happy until I let him. And he says that he has pictures in his barbering magazine showing just how it should be done. And he says that if I will only let him cut off my hair he will feel to his dying day that I am his in a more than earthly way, and that after his dying day the Blessed Virgin will bring us together in Heaven. . . . Is he not crazy, that scarecrow barber?"

Mrs. Morton reflected. "Well, it is an unusual idea. But I have heard of such things before, Clara. Why don't you let him cut off your hair? It would be cooler in summer,

and easier to arrange, and it might be very becoming to you. You have such a fine profile—bobbed hair might show it to advantage."

"I? Have my hair cut? Never, never, Señora!"

"Certainly not, if you dislike the idea." Then her mind turned back to the problem of her own involvement in this mysterious episode.

"But Clara, why is Manuel so angry at me? It is not I who have refused to marry him or to let him cut off my hair."

Clara was embarrassed. "Señora, that is where I have done wrong. It is all my fault." She began to weep again.

"Now, Clara, crying will do no good. Just explain to me. I shall not blame you for anything whatsoever."

"Señora, I was desperate. Manuel had asked me over and over again to marry him, and at last he gave that up, for he saw that I really meant my refusal. But he did not feel the same way about my refusing to have my hair cut off. He said it meant so little to me and so much to him, and he could not see why I would not let him. He begged, and then grew angry, and then grew humble, and grew angry again, and stormed and cried and was just terrible. He said he simply must cut my hair off. He said his life would be torture until he had done so. And then he looked at me with his sad look like a crucified Christ—and then he stared at me like a devil. And I was afraid. I was afraid he would kill me."

"Why, Clara! You don't mean that. You told me yourself that Manuel would not hurt a fly!"

"Well, perhaps not, Señora. But at any rate I was at my wits' end. So I told him a lie. I told him that I myself was

perfectly willing to have him cut my hair off, but that . . ."

"Yes?"

"But that I could not, because the Señora had forbidden me to! I told him that you had flown into anger when I asked you if I might, and that you told me that you would throw me into the street if I did, and would never look upon my face again. Oh, I told him terrible things you had said! . . . I am a wicked woman . . . But I did not know how else to protect myself. Now I must go to him tomorrow and tell him that I have lied, and that the Señora has never forbidden me to have my hair cut off. Oh, I am so ashamed to face you! And I do not know how I can bear to face him! He is such a nice fellow—so romantic! He will be so hurt when he hears I have lied . . ."

"So that is what the whole matter is about! I understand now why poor Manuel fancied that I was his enemy! Well, Clara, this is nothing very tragic. You go to bed now, and tomorrow we will decide what to do. We will find some way of fixing things up so that you will not have to have your hair cut and will not have to tell Manuel of things that are just between you and me. Wait until tomorrow, Clara, my dear! And now, good-night."

Mrs. Morton was on most occasions a woman of notable reserve and poise. But all her life she had found that at moments there surged up in her a flash of the nature of the stormy petrel, which either seeks out the tempest or mysteriously draws the tempest toward itself. Tonight as she was drifting off to sleep she felt the turbulence of that stormy petrel mood to be strong in her, and she suspected that it would devise some whimsical devilment for her. She closed her eyes and sank into oblivion, knowing that in the

morning she would know more of her own intentions than she knew now.

(3)

In the morning, she found that her mind was made up for her; she had a clear and, she thought, intelligent plan. There were three branches of the problem to be solved: she must save Clara's hair, she must protect Clara's pride, and she must end Manuel's absurd enmity toward herself. She thought she perceived a way that would make him her friend, and at the same time distract his mind from his fantastic fixation on the locks of Clara.

Soon after Pedro had brought her breakfast and she had relishingly consumed the fruit and coffee and toast, she set out down the street with her stick. She carefully avoided any chance of seeing Clara, for she did not wish to discuss her intention with anyone; she went out through the small garden gate by the lakeside instead of through the large front gate which she customarily used. She smiled to herself grimly. What she was going to do might be grotesque, and it might not produce the desired effect on Manuel; but she was very hopeful, and went resolutely on her way.

Thumping down the cobbled street, she approached the plaza, crossed between the band-stand and the flower beds, and marched up to the door of Manuel's barber shop. She looked into the dim little tunnel. It appeared to be empty. Perhaps he was in some back room. "Manuel, may I come in?" she called from the doorway.

At the back of the shop something moved. Then she realized that the shop had not been empty, for the face of Manuel, covered with white lather, emerged from the

shadows. She had apparently intruded at the inopportune moment when he was giving his leathery jaws their morning shave.

"Oh, I'm sorry to have interrupted you. I'll come back later."

With a sweep of his arm that would have done credit to the great Don Quixote himself, Manuel advanced. "Will the Señora be pleased to enter?" With demon-like swiftness he seized a towel, wiped the lather off his face, dashed his arms into the sleeves of an old black alpaca coat, and stood silent.

"Good morning, Manuel. Are you too busy to do a little work for me?"

"I am at your service," he said gloomily.

"I should like to have you cut my hair off."

"I do not understand, Señora."

"I should like to have you cut my hair off—to bob it, please."

Manuel glared at her. "The Señora is making fun of me!"

"No, I'm not. I have often thought that it would be cooler that way in summer, and easier to wash, and more comfortable at night. And I notice in the illustrations of *The Illustrated London News* and *The Queen* that a considerable number of distinguished ladies have taken to wearing their hair that way. And furthermore, my hair is not long, beautiful hair which it would be a pity to cut; mine is short and scraggly and hard to keep tidy. So I thought I would like to try the newer way. Of course if you yourself don't care to oblige me by doing it, I can

probably find somebody in Guadalajara who knows how. But I thought that perhaps you could do it better."

Manuel's face was gloomy. "The Señora is not afraid? Not afraid to sit there in that chair while I cut, cut, cut?" He peered at her fiendishly.

She shook her head, smiled and sat down in the chair.

His expression changed into the rapt look of a visionary. "Pardon me a moment, Señora." He scurried into the back of the room, washed the remnants of lather off his face, scrubbed his hands with a brush and soap, changed to a clean white coat, brushed his hair before a mirror, and returned to his operating chair. "I shall be honored to perform a work of art in the great tradition of barbering. One of my most famous ancestors, whom you may have heard of—his name was Don Quixote of La Mancha—he also was a barber."

Swiftly he set to work. His burning eyes were so intent upon her hair that he never met her glance: he was a great artist straining toward beauty, a great astronomer groping through infinite confusions of chaos into new realms of truth. She closed her eyes and relaxed. Now that she was committed to this step, she did not want to watch the intermediate stages between long hair and bobbed hair. Perhaps she would hate herself when she saw the result—but there was no turning back now.

She laughed to herself as she recalled a similar occasion of a graver nature: a moment long ago when she lay on an operating table in St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, with the glare of lights and white tiles and nurses' white uniforms and shining instruments around her, and with her friend Dr. Fergus MacKnight, the famous surgeon, stand-

ing in masked and impersonal silence like a great white thunder-head before the storm—and she had had an absurd momentary impulse to get up, and say she didn't want to be operated on after all, and run out of the hospital. Her pride had restrained her then, and she submitted quietly to the ether mask. Her pride restrained her now.

Snip, snip, snip, snip . . . Combing, combing . . . snip, snip, snip . . . Combing . . .

The falling hairs tickled her face. She grew used to the monotonous rhythm of the shears. She thought drowsily of other matters, and tried to forget what a frightful sight her hair might be.

She awoke. "It is finished, Señora!" A proud boastful voice was addressing her. "And it is a masterpiece!"

She looked at herself. Well, it was a little startling not to know who you were when you saw yourself in a mirror; but she did not question for an instant that this stranger looked very intelligent and alive and handsome in her new disguise. She shook her head to get the feel of it. Very pleasant in feeling.

She studied her appearance again. No, she did not look absurd or girlish; she looked like some sensible alert woman doctor or woman novelist. She had suspected that this would be the result; otherwise she would not have embarked on this enterprise.

"It looks very fine, Manuel. You are an artist, are you not?"

His gloomy eyes lighted up. "It is a lonely life, to be an artist, Señora."

"Yes, it must be. All lives are a little lonely, I think. All people are a little different, one from the other, so each

must go on his own way. For example, some people like to have their hair short—as I think I shall, when I get used to it: other people like to have their hair long. We must make allowances for differences in personalities, don't you think? We can't all be the same."

Manuel's sad eyes were fixed on her face. "The Señora is right."

"Now, Clara, for example. She is not like me. With her long dark hair, she looks a little like the Blessed Virgin herself. Nobody would dare suggest that the Blessed Virgin have her hair cut. Hair like that is sacred."

"The Señora is right."

"Manuel, you will not make Clara unhappy any more, will you? She thinks you are such a fine man, and both she and I want your friendship. Will you give it to us?"

Manuel did not speak. He stood with bowed head.

Mrs. Morton took up her black bag. "And how much will that be, Manuel?"

He shook his head, and suddenly bending low kissed her hand.

She said: "Then, thank you very much, Manuel. *A Dios!*"

She turned to go. From the street, she glanced back into the darkness of the shop and smiled. It almost seemed to her that Manuel was returning her smile in his remote dim way.

X

A CANDLE FOR ST. CHRISTOPHER

HOURS——DAYS——WEEKS——MONTHS: what were they at the Villa Colima more real than the small ripples or the large waves that swept over the surface of the lake, vanishing slowly or rapidly beyond dim horizons?

Mrs. Morton rubbed her wrinkled hands together as she sat quietly on the terrace. It was late afternoon. She looked down cheerfully at the wide sweep of Lake Chapala, and though her hand quivered a little as she raised her tea-cup to her lips, she did not spill a drop. She greatly enjoyed her

tea. For her, this hour of quiet golden afternoon and pleasant refreshment was always the happiest of the day.

The date-palms rising before her above the well-ordered flower beds—the tranquil lake—the far blue mountains —these were her world; and she was content that now, in her old age, nothing more was to happen. She sipped her tea. She was without hope and without regret: for there was nothing more to hope for except peace; and she had never done anything wicked, anything that she could honestly say she regretted. There had been mistakes, but no malice.

In a sudden wide extension of vision—with almost the strangeness of an ether-dream—she seemed to see a picture of the whole earth as a fair plain of flowers, where here and there in spots arose hideous swirls of copper-colored smoke—the spots where cruel and violent acts were being done. She looked carefully at her vision, but she could not see any copper-colored smoke arising from her garden.

Pedro came quietly out onto the terrace, bringing a plate on which lay two hot toasted English muffins, nicely buttered.

She was surprised.

"Oh, thank you, Pedro. But where did you get these?"

"I got them, Señora," Pedro said. "Here they are. Do not ask me how."

"But Pedro, you must tell me!"

"I cannot tell you."

"But you must."

"I stole them."

"My good Pedro, you did not steal them?"

"I did, Señora—from a mere tourist at the Widow Sánchez' this afternoon. He had just come from Europe, and he was not a nice-looking man, and he had many of these muffins, in sealed tins. One tin was open on a table out on the terrace. I took only two."

"But Pedro! . . ."

"He will never miss them—and besides, I left ten centavos on his table in payment."

Mrs. Morton was too well experienced to make further comment. She merely sipped some more tea, and began to eat one of the excellent muffins. She smiled to herself as she recalled the adage that stolen fruits are sweetest. Perhaps she was a wicked woman at heart, for certainly she enjoyed this muffin.

She was happy, also, in seeing Pedro's face free from a trouble that had recently clouded it. The reason for his depression had been one of no trivial nature; she also had been uneasy, and the last three days had been a period of anxiety. Pedro's child had been dangerously ill, with a high fever and a terrifying congestion of the throat: and it was not until last night that the symptoms abated. When Pedro came this morning, he reported favorable news; and it appeared that the danger was past.

She reflected on Pedro. Next to Clara, he was the most perfect servant she had ever known. His youthful loyalty, his intelligence, his indefatigable industry, were things she did not deserve. He watched over her as she had watched over her four children when they were young—but to do that was natural for a mother, and this was miraculous for a servant in an alien land.

He was much like a guardian angel, she thought. He

would never leave her, she knew. She was eighty; he was twenty-five: it would not be long. Tears of gratitude came into her eyes for a moment; but she was still too strong for self-pity; and her backbone straightened itself, and she leaned forward and munched some more of her delicious toasted muffin.

A little breeze stirred in the palm-trees. The lake below her was blue and beautiful. She had so much to be thankful for!

"Pedro!" she called.

He appeared instantly.

"You have been back to your house again this afternoon?

"Yes, Señora."

"Your little boy—is he still getting better?"

"Oh, Señora, this afternoon all that terrible choking in his throat is gone away. He breathes now, quietly. He is not going to die."

Pedro stared at her with a terrible fixity of angry expression which she had come to understand was the mask of deep emotion in these mysterious Indian people.

She nodded her head. "I am so happy to know that, Pedro. When he is quite well, two or three weeks from now, we will give him a party—a party for him and for all his little friends—down here on the terrace—and we will have all kinds of things to amuse them: funny things —balloons and toy animals and cookies, and things like that. And they would like the puppet-show, wouldn't they? Tomorrow you tell the man who runs the puppet-show down near the Plaza to come and see me."

"Señora, you are too good." He blinked and scowled fiercely as he walked away.

She smiled to herself. "Yes, we shall have a nice party for all those poor little wretches!" She brooded tenderly over her plans.

When Pedro returned to remove the tea, her wise old eyes detected the fact that his face was deeply troubled.

"Have you lied to me?" she snapped. "Isn't your little boy really better?"

"Señora, he is better. He will live. I swear that I speak the truth."

"What troubles you, then?"

"Nothing."

"What troubles you?"

He hesitated, and then spoke.

"A vow I made. That is what troubles me."

"Tell me, Pedro."

He was silent.

"Tell me, Pedro," she insisted gently.

He looked away for a moment at the far distances of the lake and the mountains beyond. He wavered. Then he spoke.

"I will tell you, Señora. When I thought that my little boy was dying, I vowed a great candle to St. Christopher if he would save my boy. He has saved my boy."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Morton encouragingly.

"And yesterday this terrible wicked new government of ours has closed the church . . ."

"What!" she said in surprise. "Closed the church again?" It had been a long time since the government had staged one of these raids in Chapala. After the terrible bloodshed that had attended a similar attempt in Guadalajara a few years ago, there had been a lull in the government's at-

tempts to destroy Catholicism in this region; and Mrs. Morton had not expected this renewal of anti-Catholic activity.

"Yes, Señora. And now soldiers from Mexico City are marching up and down in front of it—and I cannot give my candle to St. Christopher."

Again his face froze into that fixity which Mrs. Morton had learned how to interpret.

"Pedro," she said gently, "don't you think that St. Christopher, with all his great tenderness, will understand the reasons why you cannot bring him your candle and fulfill your vow? Would he not be able to accept the will for the deed, since he is aware that the church is closed? I am almost sure that so great a Saint—so kind to little children —would be happy to know that your child is saved; and that he would be glad to have you wait until some other time to fulfill your vow."

"I have vowed a candle to St. Christopher," he said stubbornly.

"But Pedro, St. Christopher knows that!—and he knows that you fully meant to keep your promise; but that now it is impossible."

"I have vowed a candle to St. Christopher!"

She shook her head, unable to penetrate further into the mysteries of the mind she was confronting.

Stoical agnostic though she was, she was not so stupid as to be unable to sympathize with the religious feelings of other persons, even though she could not understand them completely. Her thoughts wandered on with Pedro's, but soon lost the track. She did not know what he was thinking.

Pedro carried away the tea things. Mrs. Morton sat looking out through the palm-trees to the vast beautiful lake. So tranquil, so exactly suited to her simple spiritual needs, now that life was over. She did not fear death; she did not fear bandits or revolutionaries or the local politicians; she could cope with all these things. But she was troubled. She was troubled for Pedro. She could see that he was brooding darkly. His hand had trembled violently as he carried away the tea tray. She had never seen his young hand tremble before. But she felt helpless to interfere in whatever struggle was going on in his mind. He was as much a human being as she was; and his privacy was his own, and inviolable.

After he had served her at dinner, she read a little while in the living-room, and then went slowly upstairs to her bedroom.

Pedro, seated on the ground in the garden, watched her window. He saw the light go out.

Then he fastened all the doors of the house, carefully. Then he made sure that Chango was in his little house in the courtyard, and that he was not very drunk tonight.

"Chango, I am going out," Pedro said. "If you go down to the *cantina* tonight, I will beat you tomorrow. You are to stay with the Señora. You hear me?"

"Why, of course!" Chango said innocently.

"Of course! Of course!" Pedro mocked him. "Of course! Of course! Of course! . . . Chango, where is your big hammer?"

"What hammer?"

"Shall I kill you right away? Go and get your hammer!"

Chango reluctantly arose from the cot-bed where he was

reclining, walked in his bare feet across the little room, and inspected a shelf.

"No, it isn't here."

"Then it's out in the pump-house. Go and get it!"

Chango departed, groaning. In a moment he returned with a heavy hammer in his dirty hand.

"Many thanks," Pedro said politely. He thrust the handle of the hammer into his belt, and adjusted his jacket so that the hammer was concealed. "Good-night, Chango. You heard what I said about going down to the *cantina*!"

Chango nodded, and returned to his flea-populous cot.

Pedro went out into the courtyard. He noted that the lights in the house were now all extinguished. He carefully closed the big gate leading into the grounds.

He went out through the smaller garden gate, which he locked after him. He strode swiftly down the narrow moonlighted street. The high walls of gardens and houses rose on either side of him, as in a canyon, and his shadow walked black ahead of him, a mocking specter. He was aware of his surroundings, but only vaguely; for his heart was set on a purpose that brooked no denying.

He loved his little boy, with an unreasoning love like that of an instinct-driven animal. His boy was saved. St. Christopher had saved him. Tremendous waves of gratitude surged up in his heart. He felt as if his heart would burst. The good St. Christopher, the kind St. Christopher! Pedro could almost see the great Saint's face looking down at him out of the clear moonlit sky.

The Señora was so good, too. But the mystery of St. Christopher was a thing unknown even to her.

Half-way to town, he stopped at a shop from which a dim lamplight still glimmered. He entered.

"Good evening, Pedro," the shopkeeper said.

"Good evening, Porfirio."

"And is all well?"

"Yes, thanks be to God and St. Christopher. My boy will live."

"That is happy news!"

"Yes. Show me, please, your largest candle."

Porfirio stared at him for a moment. "Don't you know that the church was closed yesterday by the soldiers? You don't dare go there. They would shoot you! They love to shoot people!"

"Show me your largest candle," Pedro said, his face expressionless. "I have vowed a candle."

Porfirio looked at Pedro keenly—then shrugged his shoulders, and taking up the kerosene lamp from the bare counter, went into the back room. In a moment he returned, carrying a gilded and decorated candle two feet long and two inches thick.

"How is this?"

Pedro inspected it. It was quite as wonderful as he had hoped for. It was a beautiful candle, very heavy, and with many marvelous holy designs applied to it in relief.

"How much?"

"To you, one peso."

Pedro hesitated. The price was high, the equivalent of a day's wages. But no, he could not bargain about this matter.

"I will take it. Do not tell anyone that I bought it: keep silent."

Porfirio stared at him shrewdly. "Certainly, my friend.

I understand you. I too hate the new government and its wicked ways. I commend you to God!"

Pedro put the candle under his jacket, paid the silver peso, and said a courteous good-night.

As he emerged into the white moonlit street, between the high walls of the gardens and houses, his heart leaped. Praise be to God and St. Christopher!

He walked onward through narrow streets toward the center of the little town.

He emerged onto the plaza. Though it was late, a dozen wizened old vendors of fruit, vegetables and peanuts were still squatting in the flickering light of kerosene torches beside their wares. Several soldiers were loafing on the park benches. Three drunken men were innocuously entertaining one another with stories and bursts of silly laughter. A small girl hurried by, balancing a tall stack of tortillas on her hand. The town doctor, with frowning brows and his habitual preoccupied stagger, passed. Pedro saw them all as in a dream. He was intent upon another dream. He put his hand under his jacket to assure himself that he still had the hammer and the candle. Yes, they were there.

He crossed the plaza, and through the bare branches of the jacoranda trees he saw the church looming before him. Its two tall filigreed bell-towers and wide front gleamed white in the moonlight. At first he thought that the space before it was deserted; but as he crossed the space, he saw that two soldiers, with rifles and fixed bayonets, were standing in the shadow of the portal.

That sight caused him to go quietly down a side-street and reflect a moment. He said to himself: the moonlight is shining full on the front of the church; behind the church

it will be dark; and perhaps there will be no soldiers there. Perhaps these horrible soldiers do not even know that there is a small back entrance to the church.

Yet he was perplexed; and he wandered for half an hour in the dark or moonlighted streets before he could summon up the resolution with which he had started out. He had moments of weakness, when he wondered whether Mrs. Morton had been right, and whether St. Christopher would not perhaps take the will for the deed. Then at last, at the dark corner of an alley, his innate integrity spoke clearly to him. "You have promised a candle to St. Christopher!" He recognized it as the voice of his destiny, and obeyed it.

Stealing along the dark side of the street, he approached the back of the church. No, there were no soldiers there.

He knew where the small door was. He approached it. With one lucky blow of his hammer, he destroyed the old rusted lock.

He entered the vast and gloomy edifice.

He had been in this church hundreds of times before, but never alone and in silence. A little moonlight streamed down from the windows, but the high stone arches were the home of shadows. Never had he been more clearly conscious of the presence of God. He was not afraid, but he was overwhelmed by his sense of this mysterious darkness. Silence and space and the Great Power enveloped him. He knelt for a moment before proceeding on his errand. God was too tremendous; he was glad that his own dealings were with St. Christopher, who loved little children.

He knew precisely where to go. The shrine of St. Christopher was on the right, half-way down the aisle. He approached the shrine.

He knelt before it, and said a prayer.

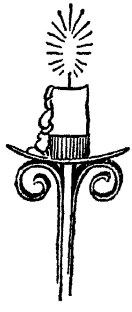
Then he took out his great candle, placed it on a tall wrought-iron candle-holder that stood on flagstones before the shrine, and lighted it. A gleam touched the high arches, and made the darkness even more mysterious. He saw the image of St. Christopher's gentle wooden face emerge from the gloom above the altar; he saw St. Christopher's familiar blue satin robe. He knew that his boy would live. He wept.

He crossed himself, rose, and went quietly down the aisle toward the little door.

His shadow, cast by the light of the great candle, walked before him on the flagstones of the church.

He emerged from the church. He did not care what happened now; he felt almost secure; his vow was fulfilled. Let the soldiers shoot him if they liked.

The two soldiers at their station before the church had seen the flickering candlelight that glowed vaguely through the windows. They now stood in the street behind the church, waiting. The corporal muttered: "So this is the way the bastards are going to begin it, is it!" As Pedro took his third step away from the door two shots rang out. Thereafter, two stumbling figures with rifles came down the moonlit street toward the body on the cobblestones.



XI

ALL ROADS TO GRAVES ARE DUSTY

IT WAS TEN O'CLOCK in the morning. Mrs. Morton, meditative and pale, reclined in an easy chair on the terrace. She was not looking at the garden or the lake: she was looking without interest at her hands. They were old hands, with outstanding blue veins.

On the other side of the house, in the kitchen, Clara was making preparations for luncheon, and singing quietly to herself. The room was dimly lighted by three narrow windows that opened onto the patio; along one side ex-

tended the customary Mexican series of tiled charcoal burners and perpetually stewing pots that gave somewhat the impression of a witches' cavern.

Chango shuffled on bare feet into the kitchen and remarked: "Our Pedro was shot by the soldiers last night. They killed him right behind the church. That was bad of them, wasn't it? The priest will be angry at them. Pedro was a good boy."

Clara put down the earthen pot she was scouring, stared at Chango, and did not reply.

Chango nodded his head sagely. "Yes, yes, the soldiers shot him for going into the church to give a candle to St. Christopher. And I do not know where my big hammer is. Pedro took it from me to break the lock on the church door. It was bad of him to take my hammer. The Señora will scold me for losing it." He paused and collected his thoughts. "But Pedro was a good boy. Yes, yes. I think he meant to bring back my hammer."

"Chango, you have not been to the *cantina*, have you?"

"No, no, Clara! You know that the Señora does not let me get drunk except on Sundays."

"Then who told you this?"

"Some men went by the gate just now, with Pedro in a cart. The men told me all about it. Pedro was in the cart. He looked as if he was asleep."

Clara remained silent. So that was why Pedro, the most perfect of houseboys, had failed for the first time in ten years to appear promptly at seven o'clock this morning; that was why Clara herself had been obliged to take the Señora her breakfast and admit ignorance as to why Pedro was not there . . . And now? . . . And now? . . .

Chango stood shuffling his dirty bare feet. "I think Pedro meant to bring me back my hammer. Don't you, Clara?"

"Go away, Chango!" she said. "I want never to see you again!"

He stared at her with the expression of a hurt dog.

Clara burst into tears. "My friend, I did not mean that! May all the blessings of the Saints and of the Holy Virgin be upon you! You will get your hammer—or another, nicer one. But I must go now and tell the Señora. Blessed Savior, what shall I say, what shall I say? But Chango, my friend, go you now and attend to your gardening, will you? Keep the garden! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Clara; yes, Clara; I will do that! Keep the garden! Keep the garden! I will do that!" Smiling his sweet senseless smile, he shuffled off toward the shed where he kept his spade and his watering-buckets.

Clara dried her tears and went out onto the terrace. She saw that Mrs. Morton was sitting there, a pale composed figure with a book in her wrinkled hands.

"Señora—Señora—I have terrible news. Pedro is dead! He was shot by the soldiers!"

"Thank you, Clara, for saying it so simply. It was hard for you to tell me, wasn't it?"

"But what I say is true, Señora! Pedro is dead!"

"Yes, Clara, I understand that. Last night after I had gone to bed the thought suddenly came to me that this would surely happen. And when he did not come this morning, I knew . . . Clara, I have been wondering if I could have prevented it? If I had gone to the church with him?"

"No, Señora! Then the soldiers would have shot you

too!" At the thought of this additional horror, Clara turned away and went back to her kitchen, weeping.

Mrs. Morton closed her lips in a firm straight line and sat in stony composure, looking out at the vast blue lake beyond the garden. Her thoughts were calm, yet they no longer seemed quite subject to her control. She was aware that she would never be quite the same after this news of Pedro's death. She had repaid in full measure his faultless devotion as her houseboy by giving him her honest love and sympathy; and this blow struck straight to her heart. He had been such a sweet boy——so gentle and so considerate and so hard to understand. If he had died a natural death, she could have endured the fact: but the senselessness, the wanton wickedness of this slaying——its madhouse-quality!

Memories of her own English dead came back to her. She saw the quiet Sussex village of her youth——the green lanes, the great elms in the village street before her father's greystone church, the peace and tranquillity of her girlhood days in that secluded spot. Here in Chapala her garden also had tranquillity; but outside her walls there stirred restlessly an incomprehensible Mexican people in whose blood the fires of volcanoes smouldered——and sometimes burst forth in ruin.

Much as she loved this Mexico, still she found it at certain times appalling.

All she could do on this day was to wander restlessly from house to terrace and then back again, murmuring to herself a quotation she remembered from the writings of the great and tragic Sir Thomas More: *Oh the cruel mindes of men, Oh the blinde heartes.*

After a while a practical thought came to her. She went upstairs to her bedroom closet, unlocked a steel box, and surveyed the large heap of silver pesos which she was obliged to keep on hand because of the complete lack of banking facilities in this little town. She carefully counted out sixty pesos, put them into an old shoe box, and carried them down to the kitchen.

"Clara," she said, "here are sixty pesos. Take them to Pedro's wife. She will need them for the funeral."

Clara took the heavy box and smiled. To Mrs. Morton this sum represented less than twenty American dollars: to Clara it represented riches. "Oh, Señora, what a wonderful funeral they can have now! With a coffin!"

"Yes. And tell her that I will give her more, later, when I find out what her needs are. Tell her I will come to see her soon. And of course take the three candles—from me, and from you, and from Chango. And light them yourself beside the body."

"Yes, Señora, yes."

An hour later Clara returned. "Oh, Señora, the poor woman is so sad—and she had no money with which to buy tequilla for a good funeral—and she is so grateful to you—and she wept—and . . ."

"That will do, Clara! I can imagine quite enough without your telling me any more."

Clara emerged from her mood of grief and became cheerful. "Do not be too sad about Pedro's wife, Señora. She feels terribly now—but a week from now she will probably be happy with another man. She is young."

Mrs. Morton closed her lips in a firm line of silence.

No meals were served in the house that day. Mrs. Mor-

ton took a cup of tea at noon, but refused Clara's suggestions that she have a little caviare on bread-and-butter. Clara ate a bit of tortilla and chili, which she did not really want. But she cooked a fine pot of beans for Chango, who sat down in the kitchen and began to eat them with relish while he wept into them. By this time he had forgotten his hammer, and the inexorable fact of death had entered his simple mind.

"Good Pedro! Good Pedro!" he kept sobbing through a mouthful of beans.

"Stop that!" Clara said to him sharply. "Hasn't the Señora enough to bear without your making a noise like a lovesick burro?"

Chango could not stop. Clara made him take his pot of beans down to the edge of the quiet lake, where he continued to lament: "Good Pedro! Good Pedro!"

In the evening, Clara stole in from her kitchen. She found Mrs. Morton sitting on the terrace, silent and thoughtful.

"You are all right, Señora? You will have no caviare? No dinner?"

"No, Clara . . . Clara, when is the funeral to be?"

"Tomorrow morning, Señora, at ten o'clock." Clara shuddered, for she could guess what was coming now.

"If I remember correctly, there is a little rip in my best black dress. Will you sew it up for me tonight, please?"

"But Señora! You are not going to walk in the funeral procession?"

"Why not? Why not?"

"But Señora, the road to the graveyard is long and dusty, and . . ."

"The roads to all graves are long and dusty, Clara."

Clara was silent for a moment. Then reluctantly she said: "But Señora—there is a special reason why you ought not to go."

"Tell me what it is!"

"Señora, there may be trouble. Everyone is growing more and more angry at the soldiers for killing Pedro. The men are drinking a great deal at the *cantinas*. Some of them are saying that tomorrow after the funeral they ought to set fire to the Police Station where the soldiers are and kill them with knives and pistols as they run out. I hope it will not happen—for it would be wicked, would it not?"

"It would be very wicked. To murder some poor stupid fellows who happen to be soldiers will not bring Pedro back to us." Mrs. Morton burst into tears—the first emotional relief she had been able to find since Pedro's death.

In a moment she recovered her composure. "Clara, my dear, you will have my black dress ready tomorrow morning. And you will see to it that Chango is decently dressed."

"But Señora—it may be terribly dangerous! Let Chango and me go alone."

"Clara! . . . Clara, I forgive you because you are overwrought and nervous—but do not talk to me like that!"

"No, Señora . . . I will sew up the black dress tonight . . ."

That night Mrs. Morton slept the sleep of utter emotional exhaustion. When she awoke in the morning she was sure that she had dreamed continuously all night, but she could recall nothing of the dreams except that they had been happy ones. Then her sense of reality returned to

her: she became aware that this was the day of Pedro's funeral, and that she intended to walk to the grave, and that there were soldiers and peasants who perhaps would die today.

She dressed herself meticulously in her severe black dress. She chose a large black hat with plumes, and was able to smile as she realized that this hat would have been fashionable in London twenty years ago and that it would still be impressive here in Chapala.

Clara brought her a cup of tea and a poached egg on thin toast. She drank the tea with pleasure, but was unable to touch the egg.

She sat on the terrace until ten o'clock, looking at the lake, which was today unruffled by any winds. Then she rose.

"Clara, are you ready?"

"Yes, Señora. And will you look at Chango, to see if he is all right?"

Clara beckoned to Chango; he came into the living-room from the hallway where he had been waiting. Mrs. Morton looked at him. From some unsuspected source he had managed to borrow an old black coat suitable for a priest and a pair of clean army trousers. In one hand he held a straw sombrero around whose brim was tied an enormous band of black crepe. With his other hand he supported on his right shoulder his gardening spade as if it were a soldier's rifle. His feet were bare.

Clara and Mrs. Morton exchanged glances. They understood each other at once.

"Chango," Mrs. Morton said. "You have done well indeed in thus honoring our Pedro. But leave the spade

behind: you will not need it: others will attend to the burial. Go and pick some flowers to carry, instead. Pick your most beautiful ones."

Chango smiled in delight. "Good Pedro, good Pedro," he mumbled as he shuffled away.

Clara, clad in the discreet black dress and black lace shawl of mourning, smiled wanly at Mrs. Morton and followed Chango out of the room.

"Be ready in ten minutes: the procession will be here," Mrs. Morton called after them.

Ten minutes later, Chango clanged open the gate and the three stood waiting. Mrs. Morton, with expressionless face, stood in the middle leaning on her black walking-stick. To her right stood Clara, tall, beautiful and grave. To her left stood Chango, fidgeting, grinning, and looking down frequently to study his coat and pants. He was carrying a lavish bunch of flowers from the garden.

Along the cobbled roadway Mrs. Morton heard the approaching sound of many feet. The funeral procession emerged from around the bend of the road.

First came the coffin, covered with flowers and borne on the shoulders of six sturdy men. Then followed the mourners. There were about two hundred of them. The women were in black, with black shawls over their heads; many of them carried flowers or unlighted candles. A few of the men wore black coats, but the majority were dressed in the white shirts of everyday life. The women walked with dignity: the men did not. Mrs. Morton tightened her lips as she noted that most of the men were drunk. They staggered and tottered and chattered. Probably they had been up all night at the wake, drinking tequilla. Mrs. Morton

knew this was the custom at funerals, but it always disgusted her.

She noted that the widow of Pedro was not in the procession. Bitterly she said to herself: "Too drunk to come!" But immediately she repented. "I must not think that: perhaps she is overcome with grief."

She signaled to Clara and Chango, and she and they took their places at the end of the procession. This was the first funeral that Mrs. Morton had ever attended in Chapala. Usually she merely sent the obligatory candle, and flowers. Today she trudged along, thumping the cobblestones with her black stick. "Funerals are ridiculous," she thought. "This is no way to honor a departed spirit." She plodded onward with the procession.

The road was long, and the feet of the crowd raised clouds of dust. Mrs. Morton coughed. Clara looked at her reproachfully.

"Señora, let us leave the procession and go home. People will understand. You have already done all that is necessary to show that you honor the memory of our Pedro. Everyone, already, is so proud that you have come."

Mrs. Morton shook her head and walked onward steadfastly.

At the grave the crowd stood silent while the coffin was being lowered. Mrs. Morton felt nothing. All her personal sense of grief evaporated into thin air as she noted the drunken staggerings of the male mourners. She wished heartily that she had not come. Clara had been right: she should have stayed at home.

She listened without hearing, while the priest performed the customary ceremonies. Her mind was a blank.

At the end, the impassive faces and perfunctory wailing of the women, and the untidy mess of flowers that they flung into the grave, were not to her taste.

The formalities were finished: only the practical thing remained to be done. Two men with spades began to shovel earth onto the coffin. The crowd, in straggling groups of tens or twenties, turned back toward the town.

Mrs. Morton and Clara and Chango remained together. Mrs. Morton and Clara walked like images of stone; Chango sniveled continuously, murmuring "Good Pedro! Good Pedro!"

"Be quiet, Chango!" Clara said at last. She and Mrs. Morton exchanged silent glances as they noted that Chango had forgotten to leave his flowers on the coffin. He was still carrying them ostentatiously before him.

They walked onward. Mrs. Morton knew that she was very tired, but she concealed her fatigue from Clara as best she could.

As the straggling procession approached the center of the town, Mrs. Morton began to listen intently to certain of the voices. Some of the men's voices were raised in raucous tones of quarrelsomeness. "Juan, I kill you if you push me again!" . . . "Hush yourself! You couldn't kill nobody!" . . . "Here, you two big fat *caballeros*, you stop fighting or I cut the ears off both of you!" . . .

Mrs. Morton marched sturdily on with the crowd, trying to ignore the quarrels and obscenities and to forget the dust. But her heart failed her. She thought she could foresee what lay ahead. The crowd would naturally drift toward the plaza before dispersing, and this route would inevitably take them along the street of the Police Station,

where the government soldiers were quartered. In the crowd's present ugly mood of drunkenness, danger hung overhead like a storm cloud charged with sudden lightnings. Some fool, some reckless fellow, would make some gesture that would inflame this perilous Mexican blood. And then! . . . In imagination, she saw the senseless attack; she heard the volleys of the soldiers' rifles; she beheld the carnage, the shrieking wounded, the bloody corpses, the grief-stricken women. And all of them her friends . . .

At last the Police Station was in sight. "Now I know what the Via Dolorosa was," she said to herself. As she glanced at the faces of some of the women, she felt that they knew it as well as she did, and were as helpless as she was. Normally these women had much influence over their men, but not when the men were drunk as they were today.

The crowd approached the Police Station, stopped, and stood in confused inaction on the side of the street farthest away from the gateway that led into the interior courtyard. Not a soldier was in sight. The crowd began to mutter. There were excited arguments, cries, exclamations, disputes. Mrs. Morton saw knives gleam here and there, and a few pistols. It was as she had feared. The catastrophe was at hand. It had happened before this in Veracruz; it had happened in Guadalajara; now it was to happen in her beloved Chapala. She began to reflect: How many wounded could she and Clara take care of in her house? Ten? Twenty? How many? . . . No hospital within sixty miles . . . And the only doctor here was a fool . . .

A man with a knife in his hand left the crowd, staggered across the street, and shrieked into the gateway: "Come

out, you cowards, so we can cut your guts out, the way Pancho Villa did!" Then he ran back to the crowd, stumbled over his own feet, and fell down.

Mrs. Morton listened intently. She heard a sharp order given inside the courtyard. Yes, she thought; of course the commanding officer has been expecting this. The matter is hopeless. He is ready . . .

Suddenly in a moment of blinding illumination she realized that she, too, was ready.

She pushed her way through the crowd, crossed the street, and stood peering in through the gateway. She could see a company of young soldiers lined up around the walls of the courtyard.

A tall heavy-jowled man strode swiftly toward her. She noted that he wore the uniform of an officer.

She spoke impetuously. "Who are you?" Her voice had no kindness in it.

The grim face of the man smiled a little as he looked fixedly down at her. "I am Captain Roderigo Hernando Montez, of the Federal Army of Mexico—at your service, Señora!"

"Can you control your men?"

His sinister smile deepened. He did not reply, but turned toward the courtyard.

He barked: "Attention! . . . Lower arms! . . . Fix bayonets! . . . Load rifles! . . . Lower arms! . . . Stand at attention!"

Mrs. Morton heard the successive sounds of the rattlings of rifles as the orders were obeyed. The courtyard became silent.

The officer took his pistol from its ornate holster.

"I am unarmed, Señor," Mrs. Morton said.

"I guessed as much, Señora." He inspected his pistol calmly and put it back into its holster. Then he looked at Mrs. Morton pleasantly.

"Yes, Señora—to answer your question—I can control my men . . . Can you control yours?"

Her severe face did not relax. She did not know the answer to this terrible question. She made no reply, but turned and began to walk toward the street.

Behind her, the officer said in a low voice: "It is my prayer that you can; if you cannot, Señora, I shall be obliged to do my duty."

"I understand," she said quietly.

He gave her an appraising glance, and walked rapidly back into the courtyard.

She stood alone before the gateway, facing the crowd of black-shawled women and staggering angry men who were muttering and jostling on the other side of a narrow street that had become a canyon to her. Her courage was gone, her sense of power was gone. It seemed to her suddenly as if she understood all the horrors of life, and as if she did not care to live any longer.

For an instant she laughed to herself, in the bitterest moment of her whole life. "Well, if I can't *be* this, I can at least *act* it!" Raising up her old voice to its full range of power, she spoke: and as she spoke, her courage returned to her.

"My friends, there is not one among you who does not know me. There is not one among you who has not seen Pedro serve me all these years—faithful as a son and gentle as a daughter. You cannot doubt what I feel today.

"But I say to you that you will dishonor his gentle spirit if you now try to avenge him. Nothing can restore him to life. His spirit has departed from the earthly world. Will you not do him the honor of being kind in his name?

"If you go on with what you intend, I see twenty of those poor young soldiers who now stand in the courtyard ——I see them lying dead here in the street. And I see you, Maria Rivera, and you, Josephina Manchez, and you, Estancia Villa——and you——and you——and you——and many more of you——I see you weeping tonight over the corpses of your husbands or your sons or your brothers who will surely die today if you attack the soldiers."

Now she was no longer acting a part. Her whole heart was in her words.

"Women of Chapala! It is to you that I speak! We must protect our men from the dangers of their own courage. We are their mothers. Cross the street——come here——and stand with me before the door!"

There was a moment of confused murmuring. Nothing happened . . . Then Clara crossed the street and stood beside Mrs. Morton. Her composed face confronted the crowd as if it did not exist.

No one else stirred.

Suddenly Chango struggled to make his way through the crowd and ran across the street. He was carrying his bedraggled bunch of flowers. When he reached the side of Clara he said: "See, I'm a soldier too: look at my pants! I belong here with the soldiers, don't I, Clara?"

Clara said: "Yes, you belong here. But be quiet, now."

"No others? No others?" Mrs. Morton called out in a severe voice.

There was no response. She could hear mutterings of discussion here and there in the crowd, but she could distinguish no separate words of what they were saying to one another. She stood silent. Clara was silent. Chango was obediently silent, holding up his flowers and smelling of them.

Mrs. Morton realized that every half-second of delay was a gain for her side of the battle. Some of the drunken men were beginning to sober up a little. Some of the women were stirring uneasily as if with the recollection of household duties left undone and midday meals to prepare for children. Some of the older people were getting tired. Two old men in the crowd appeared to be talking conciliatingly to those around them. It seemed just barely possible to Mrs. Morton that the counsel of the cooler heads would prevail. She stood motionless, and spoke no more.

She was startled to see a man dash out of the crowd and rush stumblingly across the street. She knew him; he was Ysidoro Juarez, whom she had sometimes employed as a carpenter. It was he who had made the frame for the Holy Painting of Jocotepec. When sober, he was a good workman: now he was stupidly drunk. He was waving a pistol in his right hand.

Mrs. Morton placed herself squarely in his path.

"Ysidoro, where are you going?"

"I'm going into the courtyard, Señora, and shoot some soldiers!"

"You will be killed!"

"I don't care! I'll kill a few of them first!" He started to walk past her.

"Very well," she said, holding onto his sleeve. "Then I am going in with you."

He stopped, perplexed, and stared at her out of his alcoholic daze.

Two women rushed to him from across the street. Mrs. Morton saw that they were his wife and his mother——one a handsome dull-looking woman of thirty, the other wrinkled and grey but with snapping black eyes.

The mother spoke. "And we too are going in with you, my son. If you wish to kill your mother, you may."

Ysidoro peered stupidly at his mother. From under her black shawl the old woman's eyes flashed angrily as she stared back at him.

Ysidoro's glance fell. Bitterly cursing, he turned away and walked somberly off down the street. The two women followed, whispering together.

The crowd in front of Mrs. Morton began to divide itself into little groups——conferring, growling, arguing, cajoling. Here and there a woman was whispering gently or scolding angrily to her man and tugging at his sleeve; several men responded with sullen reluctance and permitted themselves to be coaxed onward down the street toward the plaza.

Three elderly men, still very drunk, exchanged hats and began to sing the popular song, *The Cockroach.* In a moment they linked arms and were marching down the street together in the direction of the *cantina,* bawling their happy song at the top of their raucous voices.

Slowly, uncertainly, the rest of the crowd began to disintegrate. Gradually it melted into nothingness——as a dark thundercloud sometimes dissipates its force without strik-

ing, is blown apart into small wisps of momentary vapor, and disappears. This had ceased to be a mob, dominated by a mob-will: these people had become individuals again. One after another strolled off toward the market place or the plaza or the *cantina* or homeward—until only a dozen gaping small boys were left opposite the Police Station.

Mrs. Morton heard from inside the courtyard the sharp bark of the officer's voice.

"Attention! . . . Unload rifles! Unfix bayonets! . . . Stand at ease!"

Mrs. Morton looked at Clara. "We can go home now."

"Yes, Señora. You are very tired."

She glanced back into the courtyard. She saw the soldiers standing motionless. Mere boys, most of them. They looked very tired, too.

The officer walked toward her. Apparently he wished to speak to her. She paused.

To her horror, she saw Chango rush impetuously toward the officer.

The officer drew his pistol. Mrs. Morton noted as in a lightning flash that the pistol was cocked. "Oh, not that!" she prayed in frozen silence.

Chango drew himself up clumsily before the officer and gave a recognizable imitation of a salute.

"Señor *Generale*—I am a soldier too! So I give you my beautiful flowers. They were for Pedro—but I can't find him—so I give them to you."

The officer stared at Chango's blurred face, put his pistol back into its holster, and took the flowers.

"Yes, soldier, they are very beautiful flowers. Many thanks, many thanks! And since I see that you are a good

soldier and a credit to the Republic of Mexico, I hereby promote you to be a corporal!"

Chango beamed with delight, saluted, and came out to the gateway. The officer followed him, and paused before Mrs. Morton. His face was grave.

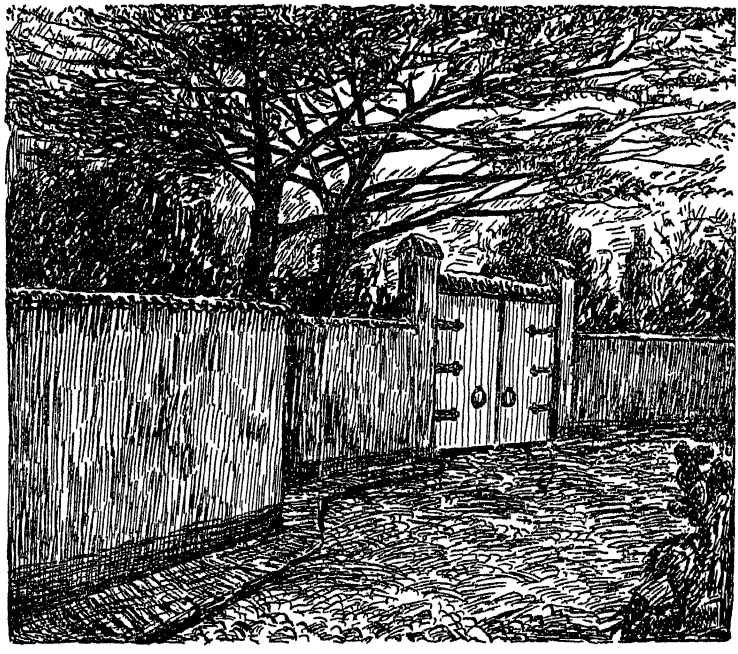
With formality he drew himself up, clicked his heels together, and saluted.

Mrs. Morton smiled faintly to him, took Clara's proffered arm, and started wearily homeward.

Chango followed behind them, humming to himself a rowdy revolutionary folk-ballad of the roving guerrilla.—

. . . *"For I'm a soldier*
Of Pancho Villa now!
I will drink the pulque,
I will love the maidens,
I will burn the ranchos
And the haciendas,
For I'm a soldier
Of Pancho Villa now!
Hurrah for Villa!
Hurrah for Villa!
Hurrah for Villa!"

Neither of the women spoke on the way homeward. Chango continued to trail behind them singing his song.



XII

CHAPALA TWILIGHT

THE STRAIN ON Mrs. Morton had been greater than she realized. The last few steps of the road required an almost intolerable effort to accomplish; and when she reached the house, she stumbled out onto the terrace, sank exhausted into a large chair, and stared at the lake with eyes that were not aware of what they looked on.

"I will rest for a little while, Clara. In about an hour, please bring me a cup of tea and a small piece of toast. Then I will go to bed."

"That will be best, far the best, Señora. And may I put just a drop of rum in the tea—the way Señor Castellano likes it?"

Mrs. Morton hesitated. "Yes, please."

She relaxed in her chair. Her thoughts were not clear or controlled; the tense activity of the last hour had operated like a fierce electric current on overcharged wires, temporarily paralyzing the lines of communication. Pedro's death seemed something that had happened a long time ago. Her emotions did not respond to it: there was no surprise in it: it was an established fact of which she had long been aware. Nor did her mind look forward into that future where so large a gap would be left by his absence. It did not occur to her that she would have to get someone else to take his place as houseboy. She merely felt that place in the life of the Villa Colima to be empty forever.

But one thought kept recurring to her with senseless monotony. A dozen times she was startled with apprehension, as she felt the terrific instant need to prevent the clash of the people and the soldiers. A moment later she would relax, realizing fully that all the danger was over and that the threatened slaughter was a thing of the past. Yet shortly afterward the same flash of panic would recur in her with its full vigor and cogency.

Am I going mad? she thought. But the fact that she seemed to suffer from no other delusions was reassuring to her; she knew who she was and where she was and all that had happened. Perhaps, she thought, only this one pattern of emotion has burned itself so vividly into my brain that a little time must pass before it can become an ordered part of my other thoughts. This reflection calmed her momen-

tary terror, and the calm in turn seemed to have a favorable effect on the recurrence of the illusion, which began to diminish in its frequency and its vividness. Yes, I am all right, she thought.

When at last she went to bed, her night was restless but not as full of nightmares as she had feared. When Clara came in to her room in the morning, full to bursting with sound arguments as to why Mrs. Morton should spend the day resting in bed, she found that her arguments were unnecessary. She was astonished to hear Mrs. Morton say:

"Clara, there is no use telling me I am lazy: I know it. But I am going to stay in bed all day, and pretend I'm an oriental dowager-queen being waited on by a beautiful Abyssinian slave girl. And nobody can persuade me to do otherwise!"

Clara had no idea what an Abyssinian slave girl was, but she was very glad to learn of Mrs. Morton's sensible decision to stay in bed. She brought breakfast and some books and newspapers, and left her mistress comfortably installed for the first day of absolute idleness that had ever been witnessed by the Villa Colima.

The day passed uneventfully. Every hour or two, Clara stole up to the bedroom to see whether any service from her was required. She noted nothing alarming. Mrs. Morton ate a little luncheon, looked at several books and magazines, dozed a little, and appeared in all respects to be behaving like an exemplary patient. Clara was slightly surprised and much pleased by this passive submission of the strong mind to the claims of the weary body.

In the middle of the afternoon, Mrs. Morton perplexed Clara by bidding her bring Chango up to her room. When

he appeared he was smiling his habitual amiable smile and fiddling with his ragged straw hat.

"Chango," Mrs. Morton said, "see if you can tell me the name of your guardian."

"Señor Enrique," he answered docilely.

"What else? Señor Enrique *what?*"

"Señor Enrique What," he repeated after her.

"No!" she said impatiently. She turned to Clara. "Hand me that pen and paper, please."

While Clara held the ink bottle, Mrs. Morton wrote on the paper: "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN. The guardian of Chango, my gardener, is Señor Enrique Devargas Castellano, Avenida Santa Veracruz 27, Guadalajara, Jalisco. Please communicate with him in case of need. (Signed) Elizabeth Morton, Villa Colima, Chapala, Jalisco."

She handed the paper to Chango. "Now, Chango, I want you to take this down to your room. Clara will give you some small tacks, and she will help you to fasten this onto the wall over your bed. Keep it there. It is very important. Do not let it blow away or get lost. You hear me? You hear me?"

"Yes, Señora. Yes, Señora. Is it a charm, Señora?"

"Yes——yes, in a way, it is a charm. You take good care of it!"

"Yes, Señora!"

"And Chango——I am so glad I remembered at last——oil the gate-hinges tomorrow."

"Yes, Señora. Yes, Señora."

Clara led him away.

On one of her visits to the room, Clara was surprised to

have her mistress look fixedly at her and say suddenly: "Clara, my dear, you are a sweet and noble woman. I am very fond of you. Did you know that? Did you know that?"

Clara smiled gravely.

"But I am getting tired of one thing about you."

Clara stared at her.

"I am getting tired of paying you wages. It is not appropriate. Mail this letter. From now on, the bank at Guadalajara will send you your usual sum monthly, as long as you live. It is all in my will—but it might as well start now."

"Oh, Señora!"

"I would like to be alone now, Clara. I'm tired."

Late in the afternoon as Clara was working in her kitchen she heard the sound of a gentle knocking at the gate. There was no Pedro to answer it. She must go herself. Now she knew, perfectly, that Pedro was dead.

She crossed the patio, approached the gate, and opened it. There stood the tall grave figure of Señor Castellano. He bowed.

"Good afternoon, Clara. I read in the Guadalajara papers this morning the sad news of Pedro's death and the account of what happened following his funeral. What terrible events! How has the Señora's health been, through this series of catastrophes?" His dark eyes looked at her intently.

"She is very tired, Señor; she is resting today. I hope it is nothing more than fatigue. But the strain on her has been hard to bear."

"Of course! Of course! As soon as I learned what had

happened, I came to Chapala at once, to put myself at her disposal in case I can be of use in any way. Pray do not disturb her at present; merely tell her, when she feels better, that I wanted to take a vacation from Guadalajara for a few days, and that I have a pleasant room at the Widow Sánchez' hotel, and that I trust that she will send me word there if I can do anything useful. And of course I look forward eagerly to the time, a few days from now, when she is sufficiently recovered from this grievous shock to permit me to come and pay her my respects."

"Yes, Señor. But—will you not please come in, Señor, while I speak to the Señora? Perhaps she wishes to see you; perhaps she would reproach me if I permitted you to go away without my telling her that you had come."

He frowned doubtfully. "Do you think it wise, Clara? Ought you to disturb her today? I could call again first thing in the morning."

"I think I had better ask her, if you permit, Señor."

"Very well." He followed her into the house, and sat down uneasily in the living-room. Clara went away.

The only sound in the still room was that of wind and waves from the lake, where a storm seemed to be brewing. The room was dim in the late afternoon light, save where the amethyst cross lifted its glowing richness of refracted and concentrated rays. His eyes lingered on the burning relic; he was almost hypnotized by the translucence; he seemed to be seated in a vast cathedral where through a stained-glass window high overhead the jeweled splendor poured its magic into the spaces of cavernous vaults and arches.

Approaching footsteps aroused him. He heard Clara's

voice. "Señor, it is as I thought. The Señora wishes to see you. Please be so kind as to come with me."

He followed Clara up the stairs into that part of the villa which was wholly unfamiliar to him. Clara knocked at a door. "Come in," he heard Mrs. Morton's voice say.

He entered. There was a curious unreal dimness in the room: the window-shades on the lakeward side were drawn halfway down, admitting the grey silver light of the cloudy afternoon, while on the other side of the room beside Mrs. Morton's large high-post mahogany bed a rose-hued lamp gave out a faint glow. The mingling of the grey and the golden light produced on his eyes an unpleasant impression, as of something ambiguous and unnatural: he would have liked to pull down the shades entirely and exclude the daylight, or else to raise the shades high and put out the lamp.

He approached the bed where, propped against large pillows, Mrs. Morton reclined. A long-sleeved kimono of dark blue was wrapped around her shoulders; her hands were hidden in its folds.

It was the first time he had seen her since her hair had been cut. She had written to him, telling him humorously of the episode of Manuel the barber, and he was prepared for the extraordinary beauty of her head which this severe simplicity of smooth white hair revealed. The clearly defined edges where they met the neck and brow seemed to add a new vigor to her aspect: there flashed into his memory some vague recollection of the heads of noble youths with smooth straight-cut hair as they appeared in the paintings of Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione. He thought: If she were photographed now in sharp black-and-white tones,

she would look like some serious mediative youth of the Renaissance—some pensive friend of Pico della Mirandola and of Lorenzo, musing beside the fountains of Fiesole. She seemed no longer English, but universal and timeless.

Swiftly following on this impression, he was shocked to see how pale she was. It was an unnatural and deadly pallor; had it not been for the live light in her eyes, he might have supposed that her heart had terminated its function of sending the tides of blood rhythmically through her veins. He had difficulty in concealing his apprehension, as he approached her with his usual air of affectionate formality.

"Most gracious Señora, it was kind of you to admit me. I happened to be here in Chapala for a little change, and the Widow Sánchez told me of all that has happened. I merely came this afternoon to leave a message offering my respects, and with no thought of intruding on you."

"I am glad you came. I would have sent for you if you had not come." Her voice was low, but perfectly distinct. His apprehension lessened a little as he heard it.

Clara was lingering in the doorway. Mrs. Morton said: "Clara, bring over that chair and place it here for Señor Castellano. Then you may go."

The visitor seated himself. "I do not need to tell you that my heart is with you in your grief over the tragedy of Pedro. I myself, also, am profoundly pained by it. So excellent a young man, so faithful a servant! It is pure tragedy, pure waste of that which was so fine and lovable. There is no philosophy that can relieve or palliate such a catastrophe."

"No, my friend, none. It is one of those things that ought not to happen. Yet it has happened."

"Yes." He meditated a moment. "I do not find, Señora, that as I grow older and supposedly wiser, I find such things any the easier to bear. Do you?"

"Not in the least. They seem worse, in fact. To call them the decrees of fate does not help at all. They seem like the acts of careless cruelty which you and I might have done in our impulsive youth—but of which we are incapable now."

"Perhaps the Universe is very young, and still childish, still careless? We do not know . . ." He paused, and tried to turn the talk into regions of less abstruse speculation. "The Widow has told me all of what happened yesterday. Ah, Señora, that was magnificence! That was greatness! You will permit me, who have so long admired you, to tell you so to your face? I should think that it must have been the supreme moment of your life."

"It was the most terrified moment of my life, and nothing more. And how can I tell what those simple stricken hearts may not do on some other day when there is no one there to restrain them? How can I tell?"

He tried to smile at her. "Ah, the Widow Sánchez tells me that the town is in almost a frenzy of excitement and of gratitude toward you! They are parading about the plaza with flowers and music; they are talking happily about the terrible events that have been prevented. Half of the people are arguing that they should come marching up here and serenade you; and the other half argue that nobody must come to disturb you; and they are all so busy in their amiable disputes that they will, of course, do nothing at all."

She smiled.

"And the people feel much better because of the news that the two soldiers who fired the fatal shots have been sent under arrest to Mexico City, and word has gone around that they are to be court-martialed and shot."

"What! That is not true, is it?"

"No, no! At least, I cannot imagine that it is true. Doubtless the commanding officer sent them away merely to ensure their safety and to mollify public opinion."

"Excellent. Very shrewd of him. He is a good officer. I like him."

She relaxed a little as if she were already tired. He noticed it immediately. "Dear Señora, I am tiring you! I must leave you now, so that you can rest and be quite recovered tomorrow. I will come then again, and perhaps you will permit me to see you." He started to rise.

She shook her head. "No, don't go." She put out her thin blue-veined hand, grasped his hand, and pressed it. "Sit down again. Do you mind? Just stay a little while. We won't talk. Just rest here a while."

He obeyed, and sat back quietly in his chair. She relaxed against her pillows and closed her eyes.

His glance turned aimlessly and slowly about the darkening room. Beyond the half-drawn shades the outside world was grey with twilight. Inside, the warm glow of the lamp touched the corner of a picture frame or the polished arm of a chair into a spot of light, and there were streaks of rainbow-gleam along the beveled edges of the large mirror above the dressing-table. His eyes wandered to the ceiling, where vague concentric circles of light from the lamp shaded into one another with geometrical regularity. He took to counting them, but was baffled by the impossibility

of deciding where one circle left off and another began.

He did not wish to think or to feel anything; he wished to be perfectly blank and emotionless, and to give out no vibration of nervous tension that could disturb Mrs. Morton's quiescence. He glanced at her surreptitiously. Yes, the strangeness of her newly-cut hair did not make her seem strange to him; it merely revealed with new distinctness the characteristics with which he had long been familiar. All vagueness of outline was gone: the clear-cut sculptured integrity of the finely proportioned head was liberated with the distinctness of an engraved Greek gem. He remembered suddenly that he had in a little cabinet in his study in Guadalajara a carved Greek seal of dark sardonyx showing a young athlete with filleted brows. He must bring it next time he came to Chapala and give it to her: there was a certain vague spiritual resemblance between the two heads.

Suddenly her lips moved. Her eyes were still closed. She spoke:

"You are aware, I suppose, that you and I are not likely to meet again?"

"Dear Señora," he said with gallant tenderness, "you are, of course, very tired today, after all that has happened. It is no wonder that you think such dark thoughts. But surely a period of rest will restore you. And then we shall meet many times again. We shall walk many times again in your garden."

"I know better than that. My strength flickers now like a candle flame. At some puff, it will be gone. So I want to speak to you very seriously now." She opened her eyes and looked at him fixedly.

He nodded his head, waiting.

"I have lived long enough—but you must go on. You, with your great powers of perception and of speech, you must go on! You must continue to express in your poetry the tragic beauty of life and the dignity of the individual spirit. Many men will argue and will battle for this or that plan for the liberation of mankind; but you must stand firm in a battle that is beyond all their battles. You must defend the lonely integrity of the soul: you must defend it in your life and in your work—as you have always done. I do not care whether you ever *write* another word; I know that merely to *be* the incorruptible spirit which you have always been is to influence the history of man. I hope that in the moments when your work seems to you futile you will remember what I am saying to you. Do you hear me? Do you hear me, Enrique Devargas Castellano?"

"I hear you." He found it difficult to speak. The curtain of inexpressiveness and emotional quiescence which he had wrapped around himself was shaken by gusts of feeling. His habitual calm was trembling in the tempest of desired utterance. The essential daemons of his spirit were tearing at their imprisoning walls.

Presently she went on: "I need not conceal from you, Enrique, that your friendship has been the most precious thing in these my later years. Always after you have been with me I have breathed a purer air and seen a clearer sky, being aware that I had walked beside a spirit taller than the generality of mankind. I should think it would make you a little happy in future days of weariness to remember that. I do not want you to forget that for twenty years you have been dearer to me than all the rest of the world."

He did not reply. He stared at her with intent eyes; his

face was frozen into an expressionless mask. After a moment he turned his face away from her.

It was she who broke the silence. She spoke hesitantly.

"Your play—*El Torbellino Fuerte*—have you finished it yet?"

"I added the last touch to it yesterday."

She wavered on the edge of speech; then she said: "This is a very great deal to ask of you—but once you seemed to be considering . . . No, I will ask one more thing of you. Will you dedicate *El Torbellino Fuerte* to me?"

"Your name already stands on the dedication-page. I was only awaiting your permission."

"Ah!" . . .

There was a long silence. He did not look at her nor she at him. At last she spoke.

"I think you had better go now. We have said all there is to say."

He rose unsteadily and turned toward her. No light came from the windows, whose blank spaces were now possessed by the night. The thin light of the lamp revealed little of their two faces.

Quickly he bent and kissed her hand.

"Good-night, Elizabeth," he said.

"Good-by, Enrique."

He looked at her as if he would speak again. But he did not speak. He drew himself up to his full height—and erect like a tall grey ghost walked slowly out of the room without looking back.

Next day the wind subsided. The furious waves ceased, that had been hurling themselves against the lower edge of

the garden and dashing their spray halfway up to the house. An oily swell moved up and down on the face of the waters, bearing up and down in monotonous rhythm the acres of floating hyacinths which the wind had carried here from the east end of the lake to drift about like islands of greenery.

Chango, barefooted and dirty, plodded mechanically up and down the garden-paths. He was watering the garden, dipping up water from the lake and carrying it to where it was needed on the terraces above. His bare feet plodded up and down the slope, soundless as a ghost that would perhaps haunt this garden forever.

Late in the afternoon, the grey clouds parted in the west and the sun streamed out in brilliant shafts like the spokes of a wheel. The lake-spray that still hung in the air caught the light and made each ray separately visible. The far-off mountains across the lake were blue, hazily outlined, unreal as clouds.

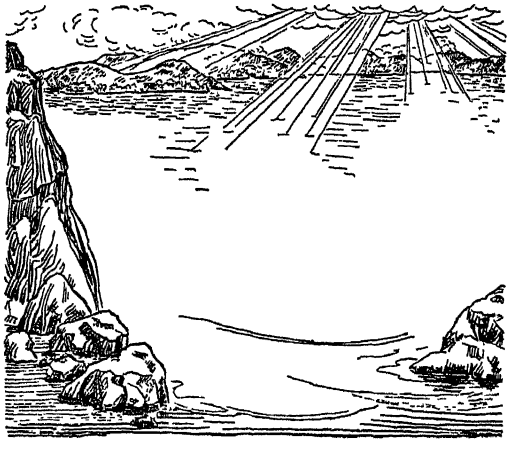
Chango paused, set down his water-buckets, and watched. Then, very rapidly, the whole west opened its bosom of flame in an explosion of blinding light. Infinite spaces of gold and blue appeared beyond the portals of the clouds. Minute wisps of cloud soared there, like golden swallows. Earth seemed hardly to exist, under the glory of the aerial fire.

It lasted only a moment. Then the clouds closed their gates. The lake darkened; the mountains became invisible.

"That was the Señora going into Heaven," Chango said, and knelt down and crossed himself.

When he rose to his feet, he saw Clara's grave, melan-

choly figure come slowly out of the living-room and stand on the terrace motionless. When she caught sight of him, she did not speak, but raised her right hand and made the sign of the cross.



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